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MICHAEL

MRS. HENRY DE LA PASTURE
(LADY CLIFFORD)

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MICHAEL

BY

MRS. HENRY DE LA PASTURE
(LADY CLIFFORD)

AUTHOR OF "PETER'S MOTHER," "DEBORAH OF TODS," "MASTER CHRISTOPHER," "THE LONELY LADY OF GROSVENOR SQUARE," ETC.

"Choose well, your choice is brief, and yet endless."

GOETHE

NEW YORK
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MICHAEL

CHAPTER I

MRS. LOVEDEN occupied a small house in a quiet London square, not far from the Brompton Oratory.

Being a widow and childless, she lived alone; and having but a slender income she seldom left home, except to visit her eldest brother, who lived in the north of England, or her only sister, who lived in Wales.

She was fifty-seven years old, but she had not discovered that life was less worth living on that account; on the contrary, she was, perhaps, more keenly interested in her own existence and surroundings than she had been twenty or thirty years earlier.

Her little house was very comfortable, her four maids excellently trained, and she had a spare room which was always at the service of any member of her family.

She subscribed to a circulating library, and sometimes had scruples of conscience over the amount of time she spent in reading.

But what else was there to do during the long evenings, when she had said five decades of her rosary, and grown tired of knitting and of playing patience?

Mrs. Loveden had been brought up in days when ladies were not supposed nor expected to do very

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much outside their own houses; and though she believed she was now as active and as well able to exert herself as she had ever been, she would in truth have found herself both helpless and alarmed had she been suddenly confronted with any great change in the conditions of her existence.

Though she read so many of the books of the day, modern thought and problems had passed her by. Her mind was not inclined to grasp new ideas, perhaps not able to grasp them.

She regarded them and read of them with mingled curiosity and disapproval; much as she would have regarded the strange reptiles in the tanks of the Zoological Gardens.

That such things existed she could not doubt, since here were actual living specimens of them; but they were outside her experience, thank God. They had nothing to do with her. She would have been as much surprised to find an unorthodox notion taking hold of her brain as she would have been to find an alligator in her bath.

She was wrapt round, figuratively speaking, in a soft, impenetrable cloak of faith, hope, and charity, and breathed that atmosphere of placid content, which is the next most enjoyable condition to that of active happiness. She gave so regularly to the charities on her list, that she passed for being comfortably off, and most people would have been surprised to learn on how few hundreds a year that snug little house was maintained.

Mrs. Loveden economised rigidly in her household; women living alone are supposed to enjoy, and certainly manage to encompass, marvellous economies in small matters; nevertheless when her

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brothers or sister, or her nephew and nieces, visited her, Mrs. Loveden took care to provide the most excellent little luncheons and dinners — well-ordered, well-cooked, and well-served. When she was alone, doubtless a poached egg sufficed for her evening meal, while a single cutlet or a little fish contented her at midday.

But had she not been thus careful, her charities might have suffered, for she possessed, in the midst of her generosity, very rigid and conventional opinions regarding the propriety of maintaining an appearance of dignity. She felt that she owed this respect to the memory of her late husband, who had shared these ideas, as well as to the traditions of her own family, one of the oldest, if one of the poorest, Roman Catholic families of England.

But she had learnt to *ménager* her personal expenses from her earliest years, and she was thereby enabled to give away quite a fifth of her income, and yet to put by a margin at the end of every year.

The knowledge that she was thus living within her means gave her an intense secret pleasure, and when she was actually able to save twenty or thirty pounds, the choice of an investment, the correspondence with her eldest brother on the subject which ensued, and the dignity of adding to her capital, increased that pleasure.

In person, Mrs. Loveden was of middle height, inclined to stoutness. She was one of those women who begin to look elderly at thirty, and change very little in appearance on the road to sixty.

She had been a widow ten years, and wore modified mourning still; rich black silks with little frills

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of tulle to soften the lines at the throat and wrists; and becoming bonnets with long black veils.

As a concession to fashion, she wore a coronet of sandy-grey plaits instead of a cap, above a neatly curled and innocently obvious front which did not match the plait.

It was perhaps this never changing *toupet cendré* that had caused her to look middle-aged when she was still young, and would continue to make her look middle-aged when she should become old.

She had a pleasant face, rather massive, with kind grey eyes; her features were irregular, and her ears too large; but her complexion was of waxen clearness and her hands were white and well-shaped.

Most families have a habit of labelling their respective members with certain individual failings, and Mrs. Loveden was suspected by hers of an inclination to worldliness.

Perhaps the assumption rested merely on the facts that she lived in London and wore a *toupet;* perhaps it dated from earlier days when she had shown less piety and more care for her appearance than her younger sister; but there it was; and Mrs. Loveden even shared the conviction, though she said sometimes to herself, good-humouredly, that it was hard to sustain comparison with saints.

Her eldest brother, Ambrose, lived in the old square stone-built north-country mansion that had been occupied for generations by the de Bronvilles.

It was said that the land for miles around had belonged to them from the time of the Norman Conquest; but the greater part of this ownership was now only legendary.

In later years, it was certain that their allegiance

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to the House of Stuart and the Church of Rome had cost them dear. There remained to them now of all the lands and houses that had once been theirs only one poor manor. To this they clung, though a smoky manufacturing town had sprung up about their doors, encroached upon their park, and shut in their pleasure grounds, so that the very birds in the garden were sooty as London sparrows.

Mr. de Bronville could have disposed of this remainder of his family acres advantageously, for land was now sold by the square foot in the heart of the town, where his property was situated. But he preferred to occupy the house which his fathers had held so dear, and which in its day had sheltered many a runaway, and hidden in safety outlawed royalists and priests in danger of their lives.

Once a year Mrs. Loveden visited her brother, whom she respected sincerely, and loved in spite of his somewhat severe and gloomy disposition.

She never ceased to urge marriage upon him as a duty, though he was now nearing sixty; but he remained unmarried, and as his only brother, Joseph, was a Jesuit priest, it appeared certain that the de Bronville family would presently die out, and leave only a name in history.

Loyalty and fraternal affection alone enabled Mrs. Loveden to face that yearly ordeal of her visit to her brother; for she loved warmth and comfort, and the society of her fellow-creatures, and Ambrose de Bronville despised all these things.

His house was cold and draughty, and though she was careful only to visit it in the height of the summer, she felt it to be like a vault.

'I can't think how we ever lived through our

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childhood,' she would say to her faithful maid, Sims; and Sims would answer, shivering, 'Nor I, ma'am, though with all this coal-mining about one would think fires all the year round wouldn't be begrudged. And if it's like this in July what must it be in January?'

But if Squire Ambrose spent nothing on his house, he spent much on his church; and a large Irish congregation thronged it, and blessed him; and his hand was moreover always open to the poor and needy.

It is probable that in his own way he enjoyed his solitary existence as much as his widowed sister enjoyed her life in London; he got plenty of shooting on the moors, and sent grouse to her, and to the town hospital he had helped to build; while within doors he occupied himself chiefly by writing learned theological treatises which it was his solitary extravagance to publish. The application for, and the granting of, the *imprimatur* of the bishop of the diocese, usually entailed a considerable delay, and necessitated a somewhat heated correspondence with an overworked cleric; but at least the author was thus assured of one careful reader.

The annual visit to Wales, where dwelt Mrs. Loveden's younger sister, in a half-ruined but wholly magnificent castle overhanging the banks of the Gwy, was as cheerful as her visit to the north of England was usually the reverse.

Lady Gryffydd was also a widow, but she had a grown-up son and two pretty daughters; and far from being stern and silent like Squire Ambrose, she was a particularly amiable and loquacious person.

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The six weeks Mrs. Loveden spent annually at Aberfraw Castle were probably the happiest of her year; though, with that fortunate preference for home which distinguishes most householders, she was never sorry to return at the end of that time to her snug quarters in London, and found no bedroom so comfortable, no windows so well-shaped, and no arm-chair so conveniently placed for the light as her own.

The youngest of the de Bronville family, Joseph, was the best loved.

He possessed the amiability of Lady Gryffydd and the cheerfulness of Mrs. Loveden, together with the ascetic and self-denying qualities of his elder brother.

Every year he refused to take a holiday, and every year his sisters obained secretly from his superior an injunction laid upon him to do so.

Thus in addition to those occasional visits which he paid to Mrs. Loveden when duty took him to London, she had the happiness of enjoying his company for a few days annually during her summer visit to Wales.

In an existence so regular and so ordered the least thing happening out of the usual course of events was remarkable, and when Mrs. Loveden, on her return from early mass one spring morning, found a telegram from her sister asking her if she could receive her on the morrow for a short visit, she was very much startled; for though young Sir Bernard Gryffydd and his sister occasionally stayed with her, their mother rarely came to London at all.

She replied instantly in the affirmative, and busied herself in making every preparation she could

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think of; yet her curiosity and interest were so great that the time seemed long until her sister arrived.

Lady Gryffydd was not unlike Mrs. Loveden in appearance; but though actually younger, she was less well-preserved. Her features were smaller and showed signs of past prettiness, her pale blue eyes wore an appealing expression, and there was something soft and flabby about her whole personality.

She wore a widow's cap above her parted, sandy-grey hair, and jet ornaments upon her ample bosom. Her black gown was dowdy and ill-fitting, but her very indifference to its want of fashion, and her exceedingly gentle manner, gave her a certain distinction.

The sisters were always particularly affectionate and glad to see each other at the beginning of a visit, and if some of the gladness wore off on closer association, their slight differences of opinion never degenerated into squabbling.

Mrs. Loveden, determined to show that she thought nothing too good for her sister, provided asparagus and peas for dinner, though it was much too early in the season for either in Lady Gryffydd's opinion; and Lady Gryffydd's surprised comments gave her hostess a pleasure which fully compensated her for the expense of the purchase.

'We are quite like the town mouse and the country mouse, Lucy Agnes,' said Lady Gryffydd, sighing with content, as she subsided into an easy-chair before the drawing-room fire after dinner; and this was the very remark she had made upon her last visit, four years ago, to Mrs. Loveden, who replied

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as she had then replied, and as both sisters remembered, though they could not help repeating themselves:

'Well, I may not be so magnificently lodged as you are, Mary Theresa, but you cannot deny this is very comfortable.'

Lady Gryffydd had no wish to deny it. She looked round at the little yellow drawing-room, with its black ebony cabinets, Dresden china ornaments, easy-chairs covered with pale orange brocade, and shaded electric lamps, and sighed softly. The sigh was partly because she felt it to be so very comfortable, and partly because she dimly feared that Lucy Agnes must still be rather inclined to worldliness that she should thus take thought to surround herself with luxury.

Yet she was touched, because she knew very well that the giant daffodils in the silver vase on the elbow table, and the pots of golden hyacinth and *planta-genista* which lighted the corners of the room, had been bought to do her honour; while from the hours she always spent in making ready for the reception of her sister at Aberfraw she could gauge the time her sister had expended in preparing the house for her visit.

'I always say, Lucy, that no one understands so well as you do how to make things pretty and comfortable. You have the knack. I never could manage as you do. Looking round this room, it is hard to believe we are in London. Everything is so clean and spotless.'

'I have my country maids, you see,' said Mrs. Loveden, much pleased. 'And you would be surprised how well this white paint washes. Well,

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dearest, now you have your coffee, and we shan't be disturbed any more. Tell me all about everything.'

'There is so much to say that I hardly know where to begin. It is very snug being shut into this dear little pretty room together, Lucy Agnes, and knowing no one will disturb us. Just like old times when we used to shut ourselves up for a talk at home at Bronville, don't you remember? It is very difficult to be alone for a moment when one has grown-up children.'

Mrs. Loveden shook her head.

"If you were alone as much as I am, Mary Theresa, you would not grumble.'

'I don't mean to grumble, but I sometimes feel the responsibility very great. Though on the other hand one may say I have no responsibility at all,' said Lady Gryffydd, who was not remarkable for any great consistency or lucidity of speech, 'since from their earliest days I never had much influence over my children. I don't know how it happened, but so it was.'

She looked with ingenuous pale blue eyes at her sister, and made a faint attempt to put down her own coffee-cup, which Mrs. Loveden at once frustrated.

'Since they have all turned out so satisfactorily, dearest, what does it matter whether you had influence or not? I am sure you always set them a good example,' she replied, soothingly.

'I daresay they seem very satisfactory to you,' responded Lady Gryffydd, in melancholy tones, 'and I am very thankful to say they are very good children in their way; but for all that they cause me a great deal of anxiety. Often and often lately I have wished you were at hand that I might con-

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sult you; for I am not very good, as you know, at explaining what I mean in a letter; or if I *do*, ten to one I *don't* mean it by the time you get the letter. And then, too, I get scruples about writing my doubts and fears; whereas, in talking, things slip out so quickly that I have no time to get any scruples at all; and so I can ease my mind and get your advice, and no harm done, or none that can't be undone at the next word. But once a thing is written ——'

Mrs. Loveden could not help being flattered by her sister's appeal, though she knew from past experience that Lady Gryffydd was much more given to ask advice than to take it.

'Well, well. Now you are here you can tell me what you like. I am as safe as Joseph himself.'

'Joseph is very good — in fact, he is a saint, we all know that. But I cannot pretend he is as sympathetic as you are.'

'He would be if his conscience would let him,' said Mrs. Loveden reproachfully. 'What is upsetting you, dearest?'

'This engagement of Winefride's to Michael Ferrys.'

'I thought it was only a conditional engagement,' said Mrs. Loveden, hastily.

'So it is only conditional.'

'Then what can you be dissatisfied about, Mary Theresa? Of course I understood your anxiety when Bernard first brought him home, and couldn't tell you anything about him except that he had met him in Rome and taken a violent fancy to him; and still more when you wrote that he wanted to marry dear Winefride, and so far as you could

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make out, didn't pretend to have any religion at all. I assure you I was quite as horrified as you were, and I wrote at once to Joseph as you suggested and said it must be stopped. But when I got your next letter, and you said dear Winefride had every hope of converting him, and that Joseph was delighted with him, and that he was the only son of Alexander Ferrys, the South African millionaire, whom everybody seemed to have heard of except ourselves, — why of course I fell on my knees at once and thanked God.'

'Yes, I know,' said Lady Gryffydd, 'so did I.'

'You know how difficult it is, dear Mary Theresa, to find husbands for Catholic girls, unless they are willing to marry foreigners.'

'Yes, I know,' replied Lady Gryffydd.

'No doubt one regrets that this young man has, apparently, no connections ——'

'None at all,' said Lady Gryffydd, shaking her head.

'Still one can't have everything,' said Mrs. Loveden, persuasively. 'You all say he is charming in himself, and if he is so willing to be converted ——'

'However willing to be converted he may be,' said Lady Gryffydd, bursting into tears, 'and however charming in himself — and I will say there is something about him that seems to charm the most unlikely people — yet I cannot and will not let a sweet, innocent child like Winifride fall into the hands of a *roué*.'

'A *roué!*' said Mrs. Loveden, dropping her knitting into her lap, and looking aghast. 'Who has been telling you he is a *roué?*

'Mrs. Kelson of Cwmcoel.'

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'One of your country neighbors! Pray what does she know about *roués?*'

'My dear, the Kelsons do not live in the country all the year round as we do. They come up to London regularly, and travel a great deal.'

'And do they know Mr. Ferrys?'

'They met him in Cairo two winters ago. He had the reputation of being a wild and dissolute young man, given to gambling, and so on.'

'I have always heard Cairo is a very gossiping place.'

'I daresay it is, but some of the gossip may be true. He was certainly in bad company, there was even some talk about — a — a married woman,' said Lady Gryffydd; her soft face grew pink with confusion, and she looked appealingly at her sister. 'If what Mrs. Kelson said is true ——'

'That is what we must find out,' said Mrs. Loveden, in answer to the appeal.

'I knew you would take a practical view,' said Lady Gryffydd, in a tone of great relief.

'Is that all you have heard?' said Mrs. Loveden, after a short pause, during which she tried to take as practical a view as she could of these vague revelations.

'No, she said she would never have said a word about Cairo, had it not been that her brother was at the very supper party in Rome where Bernard first made Michael's acquaintance. And — and I am afraid you will be terribly shocked, but Michael Ferrys took too much wine, and Mrs. Kelson's brother and Bernard had to see him home to his rooms — I mean Michael's rooms; he had a magnificent apartment in an old palace.'

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'And pray what were Mrs. Kelson's brother and Bernard doing at this supper party?' cried Mrs. Loveden.

'Everyone was there, which made it the more dreadful. No wonder Michael got talked about,' said Lady Gryffydd.

There was a pause.

'Well, I am not surprised at your anxiety, dearest,' said Mrs. Loveden, in somewhat dismayed accents. 'An inclination to drink is certainly the worst of all. The rest might be got over, but any tendency of that sort sounds hopeless indeed.'

'I don't agree with you at all that the rest could be got over,' said Lady Gryffydd, reproachfully. 'The supper party is what I thought the least of, for I spoke of that to Winefride, though I said nothing of the rest. And she seemed to know all about that. My children tell each other everything, though they have so little confidence in me,' she added in mournful tones. 'Bernard found out it was because he was in trouble, and not a regular thing at all with him; so instead of cold shouldering him like other people, he was excessively kind to him, and it all ended in their becoming great friends. And certainly since he has stayed with us he has touched nothing but Perrier water with a slice of lemon in it, which I am told is all the fashion now for gentlemen. I must say I think it a very odd fashion. What is the good of my poor Tudor having laid down all that port in the cellar when he came of age, if Bernard and his friends won't drink it?'

'I wonder what poor Michael's trouble was?' said Mrs. Loveden.

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'He had just found out that some people in whom he trusted — a man and his wife who had been staying with him and to whom he was apparently devoted — had cheated him, robbed him of a large sum of money and run away, making sure that he was too good-natured to prosecute them. Bernard says it is a wonder men as rich as Michael have any faith left in human nature. Everyone else, of course, knew they were nothing but a pair of adventurers. You see what comes of a fondness for bad company. However, I suppose he went out to supper and tried to pretend he didn't care — he is not much more than a boy, after all. And he drank too much, and was laughing and talking very loudly when a cablegram was brought to him to say his father had died suddenly out in South Africa. I suppose the shock unnerved him altogether. He tried to get up and go away, and I suppose that drew attention to his — his condition.'

'Poor fellow,' said Mrs. Loveden. 'When a young man has no religion to restrain him it is not surprising he should become rather reckless. Perhaps it is not even true at all.'

'That is what I am hoping against hope,' cried Lady Gryffydd, with tears in her mild eyes, 'and that is why I came to you before speaking to my poor Winefride, who is so much in love that I am afraid it will break her heart to part with him. Besides — though I am not so infatuated with Michael as Bernard and Joseph appear to be — I would not condemn anyone unheard for the world.'

'Joseph was certainly very much struck with him. He had not an idea of his having a bad reputation, of course, and he was naturally delighted

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that the first act of Mr. Ferrys, on your giving a conditional consent to the engagement, was to send him a thousand pounds for his new church. I have no doubt it was Winefride's thought, but it was a very pretty thing to do.'

'No, Winefride declares it was entirely Michael's own thought. No one can deny he is very generous with his money. But the fact is Joseph is so overjoyed at the prospect of converting a millionaire, that he hardly thinks of Winefride at all,' said Lady Gryffydd, peevishly.

'I cannot let you say that, Mary Theresa,' said Mrs. Loveden, scandalised, 'though I know poor Joseph can be very provoking. He is more priest than uncle, no doubt. But you know very well that though he may be too anxious to save this young man's soul to think so exclusively of dear Winefride as we could wish, yet his motives are all pure and noble. When was poor Joseph anything but the most disinterested, self-mortified creature on earth?'

'He is, so far as he is himself concerned, and of course I don't mean that the thought of Michael's wealth influences him consciously,' persisted Lady Gyrffydd; 'no one who knew him could believe that. But unconsciously he is influenced by the thought of all it could do for the Church, and especially in the hands of anyone so pious and charitable as Winefride. That is why I would rather come to you than to him for advice in this matter, for you will agree with me, Lucy Agnes, that if what Mrs. Kelson says is true, Michael Ferrys cannot marry my child.'

Mrs. Loveden leant forward and touched her sister's soft trembling hand caressingly, though

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neither she nor Lady Gryffydd were much given to caresses.

'Your unworldliness is always a reproach to me, Mary Theresa. I am sure you do not give a thought to this man's riches.'

'I can think of nothing but of his not having been a good man — and of my innocent Winefride,' said Lady Gryffydd, and a tear dropped from the guileless blue eyes on to the clasped hands.

'What are we to do?' said Mrs. Loveden.

'I thought the best plan would be, if you did not mind, since Michael is in London, to invite him to come to this house, and ask him to his face if it is true,' said her sister, simply.

'But what assurance would you have, if he denied it altogether, that he was speaking the truth?'

'I do not for a moment think he would deny it if it were true, he is not at all that kind of man. You will understand what I mean when you see him.'

'Then he must be an honest man, at least.'

'Oh, my dear, I don't doubt his honesty,' said Lady Gryffydd, wringing her hands. 'Often and often I think myself wrong to be so thankless and doubtful as I feel about it all, though I do try and hope that by the grace of God dear Winefride will eventually convert him. But still — his influence over her and Bernard is stronger than I like; and sometimes I say to myself, suppose it all ended in *his* shaking *their* faith.'

'My dear Mary Theresa!' Mrs. Loveden cried, incredulously. 'And besides, I thought you said he had a good disposition towards our holy religion.'

'So he has, so he has. Oh, I know I explain myself very badly. I do not mean that he shows the

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slightest inclination to scoff at holy things. It is only that sometimes he has such a — such a twinkle in his eye — such a wondering look, as though he could scarcely believe we were in earnest, and not only playing at something. It may be my fancy — but if you knew what it was to lie awake at night, and think and think about one's children and what it is best to do for them. And to have no one to help one to decide. Dear Tudor never had any doubts. He was always certain he knew best, and they never dreamed of questioning his authority. But they have very little respect for mine,' said the poor lady, 'and now there is no one to back me up. They do not help me to make up my mind about anything. They laugh at me for being undecided, and do what they choose. It is all very well to say a grown-up son is such a help, but all it comes to in the end is that one feels he is criticising one instead of helping one.'

'Dear Mary Theresa, I sympathise with all my heart,' said Mrs. Loveden, pressing the hand she held, 'of course it is very hard for you without Tudor. So dependent on him as you always were, and such a strong character as he had. The children are like him in that.'

'It makes them very difficult to manage, Lucy; at least Bernard and Thekla always have been, and now Winefride, who was so much the gentlest, is becoming the same. If you had married into a wild Welsh family, for I call it nothing else, as I did, you would understand how I feel. It seems hard that all my children should be such out and out Gryffydds. They all have the same kind of reserve that made my father-in-law, old Sir Bryn,

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so hard to manage. They never confide in me at all. Look at my little Thekla, I never dreamt of her having a vocation — though I had always hoped poor Winefride might — but that is all over. And now I am told that Thekla has believed she had one ever since she was ten years old. She has hidden it all these years.'

'And now she is eighteen! Little Thekla! What does *she* think of Winefride's engagement?'

'She has not seen Michael yet, and she is not coming home for Easter. Winefride is going to stay at the convent instead. Thekla wrote and begged me to let it be so, as she is coming home for good this summer, and they have so few days at Easter. She says it would only unsettle her to come away. Reverend Mother writes I shall not know the child, she has grown so much steadier and gentler.'

'It is curious that our little black sheep should want to be the nun, and our little saint Winefride be the one to marry.'

'Almighty God's ways are not our ways,' said the mother, sighing. 'Poor little Thekla! It is true that she has always been as unlike her sister in character as she is like her in face. Do you remember how she used to frighten me by saying she meant to be an actress when she was grown up? And she was always getting up plays and turning the house upside down. And at school they all said she was the life and soul of the entertainments. But the nuns never found her as difficult to manage as I did. She has been very happy with them.'

'You will be firm about not letting her go till she is one-and-twenty?'

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'I am trying to be firm,' said Lady Gryffydd. 'She and her brother and sister know very well that that has always been the rule in our family. Though Joseph thinks me wrong to make her wait so long. He says it will not prevent her from going in the end, but will make it very much harder for her by giving her a taste for the world, and perhaps habits of idleness and visions of gaiety which she will no longer be able to indulge. But Ambrose upheld me because he prefers my father's opinion.'

'So do I,' said Mrs. Loveden, 'it is better a girl should have a chance of knowing her own mind before she enters the novitiate.'

'If her vocation is a real one, she will not change; and I shall have her with me for three years,' said Lady Gryffydd wistfully. 'I am very happy about *her* at least. My little Thekla!'

'You wouldn't wish them both to be nuns,' said Mrs. Loveden, gently.

Lady Gryffydd turned her mild troubled gaze upon her sister.

'Sometimes I almost think I should, dearest,' she said, 'if it had been God's will — to have known them safe for ever from this world, and all its temptations.'

CHAPTER II

A HEAVY shower was falling the next morning when Mrs. Loveden and Lady Gryffydd started forth together to attend eight o'clock mass; but neither sister would have considered bad weather a sufficient excuse for remaining away. Having whistled

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vainly for a cab at that early hour, they put on waterproofs and goloshes and went valiantly forth, holding up their umbrellas, and splashing over the wet pavements.

Nor did they allude to the topic which had filled their waking dreams all night, until they were at home again, and seated at breakfast.

Mrs. Loveden was not less proud of her white and green dining-room, with its collection of old coloured prints, than of her white and yellow drawing-room upstairs.

She sat at the head of a beautifully appointed table, and glanced over it with quick cheerful eyes to be sure that nothing was lacking. No deficiencies met her eye.

The silver kettle, brightly polished and reflecting the small fire that blazed in the green tiled fireplace, was singing away, and the crumpets that Lady Gryffydd loved were hot on their delicate rose-tinted china dish. The toast was crisp, the butter fresh, and the poached eggs on one silver hot-water plate flanked a filleted sole on another. The white French rolls on a spotless bread-platter faced a small brown loaf, in case Lady Gryffydd should prefer either to the hot scones folded in a snowy napkin.

The repast was light, but every detail had been carefully considered. The flowers which had decked the table on the previous night had been removed to the pantry, and a filigree basket with rosy Tasmanian apples and a couple of selected pears took their place in the centre. Mrs. Loveden thought flowers out of place on the breakfast table.

'You always contrive to have everything about you so dainty,' said Lady Gryffydd.

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'There are the newspapers, and to-day's *Punch*, all ready for you in the window,' said Mrs. Loveden, enjoying her sister's admiration for her arrangements with all the zest of a solitary woman, who seldom has a visitor, and finds it a delightful novelty to plan and cater for someone besides herself.

'Now I shall be very much hurt if you do not make a good breakfast, and as soon as it is over, we will decide how best to get hold of Mr. Ferrys.'

'I thought of sending a note round to his rooms by my maid.'

'I think a messenger boy would be better,' said Mrs. Loveden, anxiously. 'Mr. Ferrys might not like a maid, however old and respectable, being sent to his rooms.'

'That is very true,' said Lady Gryffydd, much struck by her sister's extraordinary perspicuity. 'I always feel, Lucy Agnes, how much better you know the world than I do. You think of everything.'

Mrs. Loveden smiled with modest pleasure and exerted herself to think of something more.

'My neighbour, Mrs. de Clare, has a telephone, and has begged me to use it. If you liked to try speaking to Michael direct, I would send her a little note. Unfortunately it is not much use to me as I get so flurried that I find it difficult to catch what the people at the other end are saying.'

'My dear, I would infinitely rather employ a messenger boy. I have never used a telephone in my life. It is hard enough to decide what to write to poor Michael.'

'I should simply say that you have come up here to stay with me, and would be very glad if he would

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call upon you at his earliest convenience as you wish to speak to him upon a rather serious subject,' said Mrs. Loveden, enjoying the importance of her position as adviser in so delicate a matter; though the agitation of wondering what her sister would say to Mr. Ferrys, and what Mr. Ferrys would say to her sister during the proposed interview, had kept her awake most of the previous night. 'And be sure to write *Await answer* very distinctly on the envelope.'

'I only hope he will not have gone out.'

'If he is such a *very* dissipated young man, my dear, he is not likely to be up before ten o'clock in the morning,' said the worldly-wise Mrs. Loveden, 'and it is not yet half-past nine.'

The note was dispatched to Jermyn Street, and a reply was received in a shorter time than Lady Gryffydd had believed possible when she saw the size of the boy-messenger.

'Surely he is too young to be allowed to run about these crowded streets alone; he might easily be run over and killed,' she said piteously, and could scarcely be persuaded to entrust her letter to his care.

Mr. Ferrys was very glad to hear Lady Gryffydd was in London, and would be delighted to call upon her at twelve o'clock, since she wished to see him as soon as possible.

The sisters awaited him in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Loveden was seated before her little writing-table, endeavouring to occupy her attention with her accounts; whilst Lady Gyrffydd leant back in an easy-chair by the fire, saying her rosary with her eyes shut, and starting violently every time a bell rang. As her sister was so excessively nervous

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and unhappy, Mrs. Loveden was obliged to pretend she was neither; nevertheless she sighed with relief when the Dresden clock struck twelve, and the unmistakable sounds of arrival were heard in the little hall below.

Mr. Ferrys was ushered into the room.

Mrs. Loveden knew, even at the moment of his introduction, what Lady Gryffydd meant when she had accused her would-be son-in-law of having a twinkle in his eye, and always looking as though he were wondering if she were really in earnest. She also realised the attraction that her sister admitted.

Michael Ferrys was tall, broad-shouldered and very thin. His skin was clear and brown, and his hair very dark, thick and inclined to curl.

His eyes were as little like the eyes of a *roué* as could well be imagined. They were large soft brown eyes, with remarkably clear blue whites, set beneath straight black brows that met on the bridge of a straight nose. A slight moustache shaded the upper lip, and the mouth and chin, though well-shaped, showed weakness; but the expression was so pleasing, the regard so frank, and the twinkle in the handsome eyes so irresistible that the weakness passed unnoticed.

Mrs. Loveden was so much absorbed in her observation of him that she forgot to make the pre-arranged apology and explanation before quitting the room; but stayed on and on, listening absently to her sister's laboured conversation until Lady Gryffydd gave her a look of anguish that brought her to her senses. She rose in great confusion to leave the room, and Michael Ferrys sprang forward to open the door for her.

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As she thanked him, he looked down upon her with a smile, half humorous, half deprecating, and wholly sympathetic; and she felt suddenly that she understood him, and was on his side and Winefride's, against her sister.

She was shocked with herself when she realised her feelings as she made her way downstairs.

'Just because he is handsome. But no, it is not only that. He has a *good* face. I don't believe a word against him. *And* so rich! Winefride is really very fortunate. Somehow one expects a millionaire to be plain. And even if there *is* something in that horrid woman's gossip, what temptation must have been thrown in his way.'

She awaited her sister's call, but instead was horrified to hear presently the closing of the drawing-room door, and a man's step on the stairs descending.

'Then there *is* something,' she thought, and her heart sank.

So great was her consternation that she remained standing in the open doorway of the dining-room, and the young man, as was natural, stopped short when he perceived her waiting there.

Involuntarily she said aloud, 'Oh! isn't it all right?'

'I'm afraid not; unless you can make it so,' he said, with a directness and simplicity that disarmed criticism. 'Winefride says — they all say — that you are a woman of the world — couldn't you make it all right?'

'Indeed, I will do my very best,' she faltered, more touched by his confidence than she would have liked to own. 'But surely Bernard, or my brother Joseph ——'

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'I am going to Father de Bronville now,' he said.

She held out her hand impulsively with a look that wished him good luck, and he replied to the look — 'Thank you very much' — shook hands, took his hat, and was gone.

Mrs. Loveden, with a guilty consciousness of indiscretion, if not of actual disloyalty to her sister, hurried upstairs to the drawing-room.

Lady Gryffydd had sunk once more into the arm-chair, and rested there, with traces of tears on her waxen cheeks, and her handkerchief crumpled up in her hands.

She was as anxious to tell as Mrs. Loveden could be to ask, and considerately waited for no questions but gasped out as her sister entered:

'I don't want to be uncharitable, but I cannot think he was nearly so overwhelmed with shame as he ought to have been.'

Mrs. Loveden shut the door, and drew a low chair to her sister's side.

'What did he say?'

'I told him I asked him to come, and that you had kindly left us together because I wished to have a few minutes' conversation alone with him. The kind of sentence that always makes one's own heart beat so terribly if anyone says it to oneself, for one is certain something unpleasant is coming. Well, he answered so cheerfully that though I meant to be reserved and not give him the name of my informant ——'

'I quite understand,' said Mrs. Loveden, breathless with sympathy and curiosity.

'You know when one is driven into a corner how flurried one gets, dearest,' said Lady Gryffydd.

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'Before I knew what I was about, my mouth seemed to open of itself and say, "Mrs. Kelson has been telling me some very unpleasant things about you, and I hope you will be able to assure me they are not true."'

'And what did he say?'

'As I told you, he looked quite unabashed. It is a great mistake, Lucy Agnes, to imagine that guilty people get confused. I assure you it is the innocent people who get confused. Anyone would have thought that I was the culprit, with Michael standing before me looking down on me with his arms folded, and that half-laughing look on his face. I don't think he can help it. I believe it is his natural expression.'

'Yes, yes. I can see him. Do go on. What did he *say?*'

'He said, "That is very kind of Mrs. Kelson, but I haven't the honour of knowing the lady." So then I explained she had seen him in Cairo. I can't say I explained very clearly, in fact I am afraid I did it all very badly, for I could not help crying when I said if only her dear father had been alive to take care of Winefride I shouldn't have had to mention subjects of this kind at all to him. I must say he was very gentle and considerate, very unlike Bernard, who would have scolded me for being so stupid; and that made it so much more difficult, with him picking up my handkerchief and wiping my eyes with it so gently, and begging me not to be upset, and saying I was quite right to tell him what Mrs. Kelson had said, though I had told him practically nothing, and that it was probably all quite true and a great deal more besides that

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neither she nor anyone knew anything about; and that he had been as careless in his ways of living as a man could be — until he fell in with Bernard. From the way he spoke of Bernard you would think my poor boy was a saint, which even I have never pretended he was.'

'You know, dearest, I have always told you that, unlike most mothers, who think too much of their children, you are inclined to underrate yours. To my mind they have rather remarkable characters.'

'In some ways I wish they had not, Lucy Agnes,' sobbed Lady Gryffydd. 'You do not know how terrible it will be to go against them all, but I must do my duty. I am going to write to Joseph at once.'

'Mr. Ferrys — Michael — is going to see Joseph.'

'Yes, he said he should do so. And you will see he will talk him over; but that will make no difference to me. I will not give my Winefride to a man who has been wild and dissolute.'

'But if he has turned over a new leaf — if he has repented — if he is willing to listen to Joseph's instructions and dear Winefride's persuasions, and become a good Catholic,' cried Mrs. Loveden, 'surely you must give him a chance?'

'Lucy Agnes, he has infatuated you as he has infatuated Bernard and Winefride, and even Joseph,' said Lady Gryffydd; and her weak tremulous mouth assumed an expression of mild obstinacy which her sister knew and dreaded.

Mrs. Loveden coloured faintly. 'That is absurd, dearest. I scarcely saw him for a moment. But I cannot deny that I think it would be a pity to act hastily. I am only entreating you to reflect. After

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all, may not Joseph be right in taking into consideration the enormous powers that lie in this young man's hands — the wonderful opportunities for doing good that would come to dear Winefride as his wife? Oh, dear Mary Theresa, I may be deceiving myself in speaking thus — perhaps it is only that I am worldly, as you all think me — I don't know. Living in London one begins to think more of these things than you and I were ever brought up to do in our pious home, with my dear father and mother, who cared so much more for things spiritual than for things temporal. Perhaps I dwell too much on the advantages of such a wealthy marriage, when I think of dear Bernard with so much to keep up, and no money; and neither I, nor Ambrose able to help him. None of us with any money at all — or only just enough to live on.'

'There are things more important than money,' said Lady Gryffydd, simply. 'You and I married without any portions to speak of. I would far rather Winefride followed our example, and married a good Catholic of small fortune and good family, than a millionaire with a bad reputation. And no one really knows *who* poor Michael's father was. The humblest of our tenants can go back for generations; their antecedents are known, and those who have always been upright and hard-working and respectable have their traditions to keep up, and are respected by their neighbours; but all poor Michael knows for certain is that his grandfather was a ship's surgeon who settled at Capetown. That is the beginning and the end of his family history!'

'No, my dear, it is the beginning,' said Mrs. Loveden, smiling. 'Do not forget that there must

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be a beginning even to family history. The ship's surgeon heard of diamonds to be found up country, and being an enterprising ship's surgeon, he quitted the practice he had started at Capetown, and went to look for them, and he and his son, and other enterprising men with pluck and energy and brains, started the diamond mining.'

'I did not know all that,' said Lady Gryffydd, innocently.

'My dear, I am only imagining how it was,' said Mrs. Loveden abashed.

'You have a wonderful imagination. I daresay that is somewhere near the truth, for he sent Winefride a beautiful *rivière* of diamonds, but I would not allow her to accept it. I said it would be time enough when he was actually received into the Church and they were properly engaged; but now I do not think I ought to allow even a conditional engagement, and I feel certain Winefride will refuse to break it off. Oh, dear, dear, dear! But there is no use lamenting over it any longer. I will write to Joseph at once.'

CHAPTER III

On leaving Mrs. Loveden's house, Michael Ferrys went to the nearest post-office and wrote a telegram.

'Am coming down this afternoon. Stay Royal Hotel for a night. Hoping to see you this evening.—Michael Ferrys.'

This he addressed to the Rev. Joseph de Bronville, Catholic Church, Swynbridge. He sent a second telegram to Jermyn Street bidding his servant meet him at Victoria with his things at four o'clock.

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He then bethought himself of luncheon, and that a near relative of his own lived in the vicinity.

'I wonder if it would put Aunt Milly out if I asked her to give me some lunch,' he reflected. 'No, I believe she'd be pleased. And I should like to know what she thought of my letter.'

He walked on briskly, and turned into a very narrow and humble street, with a public-house at the corner.

'Poor Aunt Milly! But I wish she wouldn't live here,' he reflected, as he stopped before a flight of spotlessly clean steps leading to a neat green door. 'The surroundings are so squalid, and I can't believe it's wholesome.'

A little row of gaily coloured hyacinths in a painted box stood on the narrow window ledge above the area.

Poor as was the abode, it was evidently cared for, and scrupulously kept. He was not surprised that his relative answered the door in person, for she was a creature of impulse, and not inclined to stand upon ceremony.

'Well, Aunt Milly,' he said, kissing her, 'I've come to ask you for some luncheon.'

'You were never more welcome, my dearest boy,' she said, beaming. 'By great good luck there is a round of boiled beef and dumplings for our midday dinner. Susan and I were wondering how we should ever be able to get through it, and yet it's a dish we both fancy from time to time. She's busy with it now, and that's the reason I answered the door. Come in, come in, and come upstairs.'

He followed her up the steep staircase, and into the smallest sitting-room that was ever dignified by the name of drawing-room.

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It was not a pretty room, nor even a comfortable one, but it suited Miss Milly Cedd.

She was quite contented with the gas-jets on either side of the fireplace, and the round table with the gilt-edged albums, and the model of a ship in the middle, with large shells arranged round it at intervals.

She liked her wicker arm-chairs, which she had enamelled with her own hands in a beautiful sky blue to match the sofa cushions; and the faded photographs in Oxford frames that hung upon the gold-starred wall-paper were perfectly satisfactory to her.

Even Michael had lost all sense of the ugliness of the little house, and the tawdriness of poor Miss Cedd's decorations; they had become so familiar to him, so entirely a part of his aunt's personality.

She hugged him affectionately before inviting him to place himself in one of the creaking chairs that stood upon the stained and polished floor, each with a little mat before it.

Then she sat down opposite him; a most attractive little maiden lady, dressed in quaker grey, her soft brown hair threaded with silver, and parted above soft brown eyes, that looked as though they had laughed a little and cried a great deal, but were, nevertheless, very like the eyes that smiled at her now from the face of her dead sister's son.

'I got your letter, my darling, and a great shock it was to me. I don't know what your poor mother would have said. To think of your wanting to marry a Roman Catholic!'

'I thought you'd be shocked,' said Michael, tranquilly.

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'I only hope she's not marrying you for your money,' said Miss Milly, shaking her head.

'My trouble is that I'm afraid she won't be allowed to marry me at all.'

'Why not? But you said so much of their being an old family that I read between the lines that they were giving themselves airs. Don't they think you good enough for them, pray? A handsome young fellow like you, with more money than you know what to do with,' she cried, in resentful astonishment.

'That's just it. They don't think me good enough. Not from a worldly point of view — or if they thought *that*, they are the last people in the world who would say so — but in a moral sense,' said Michael, with that half-laughing expression which made it always so difficult, as Lady Gryffydd had said, to know if he were really in earnest.

But Miss Cedd, at least, was in earnest.

'I don't see what chance you've ever had, my darling,' she said, sadly. 'Brought up in every country but your own, and even ending up your education at a German College instead of Oxford or Cambridge.'

'Yes, darling,' said Michael, coaxingly, 'I know all foreigners are untrustworthy, and all Germans freethinkers, and all Roman Catholics Jesuits in disguise — but that's not the point just now.'

'Then what *is* the point?'

'The point is that I want you to sympathise with me, and say how happy it makes you to hear I intend to give up foreign ways and foreign travel, and settle down in England, if only I'm allowed, with the sweetest angel that ever was born.'

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'But I'm so afraid she'll try to convert you, Michael. Roman Catholics are very artful,' said Aunt Milly, anxiously.

'Suppose I want to be converted?'

'Michael! they've been at you already.'

'Dear, dear Aunt Milly.' He pulled his chair forward and, in the midst of her agitation, she remarked with horror that the wicker feet left two long scratches on the carefully stained and varnished floor. 'You don't think I've always been a very good boy, do you, in all these years when you've so often lamented that I should be wandering about the world wasting my time and my money, with no particular object in life besides amusing myself?'

She forgot the marks on the floor as he took her little soft hand into his, and looked persuasively into her face.

'Oh, my dear, my dear, I've had my doubts. Though you've been the sweetest, kindest, most affectionate boy to your old auntie. So like my dear brother Michael, your poor sailor uncle after whom dear Mary named you. But I've often feared you were leading but a wild extravagant life. Over and over again I used to write to your father and urge him to set you to work at something, however rich you were to be. But he never took my advice, and to be sure I had no right to give it. He said the best way for you to know what to do with your wealth was to travel about the world and keep your eyes open; and he'd never had the chance to lift his from his desk at your age. But I've thought of you falling into temptation — and prayed for you ——'

'I am sure you have, dear auntie.'

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'And if you've turned your thoughts to better things ——'

'I've turned my thoughts to Winefride, and I want to be worthy of her if I can,' he said cheerfully.

'Oh, my dear boy! But in the absence of a higher motive — and I don't say love is not a great influence,' she sighed.

'It is the greatest influence that has ever come into my life.'

'But surely you can be worthy of her without becoming a Papist! Would you read a dear little book called "Pinches of Gold Dust" if I sent it to you?'

'No, darling, I wouldn't,' said Michael, kissing her hand affectionately. 'I never read your dear little books, though I always keep the last on my dressing-table just as you ask me to; because I love you,' he added, hastily, for the brown eyes filled with tears. 'But listen, I've just come from two nice old ladies who are almost as wretched over my past wickedness, which after all has not been anything so very much out of the common,' he interpolated with a shrug, 'as you can be yourself.'

She smiled through her tears.

'Then you will have had enough of old women's lectures for one morning,' she said. 'I'm not jealous of young ladies; but I don't want any rival old ones fussing about my boy. Who are they? I hope not —'

He put his hand gently over her mouth.

'Now don't say they are both Scarlet Women, because they're not, darling. One of them is Winefride's mother, and the other is her mother's sister.'

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She stroked his hand in silence.

'Do you remember my father used to say that you and my mother were the only perfectly disinterested persons he had ever known?'

'Poor Sandy Ferrys had a gift for looking at the worst side of human nature. That was only because he knew Mary better than he knew anyone else, and because he knew from her that I was like her, though she was worth a dozen of me.'

'*I* haven't met so very many of your kind,' said Michael, 'until now. And now I have found a few more perfectly disinterested people. They don't care for my money, they don't care much for anything in the world, it seems to me, except being good.'

'It's very wonderful, dear, if it is so. And the more especially as they are Roman Catholics.'

'And they would think it very wonderful in you, the more especially since you are — not a Roman Catholic.'

'My dear, you know very well that I am a good, honest old-fashioned Protestant as my father and mother were before me, and as their parents were before them. And I'm sure *they* never cared for anything but being good, if it comes to that. They put their religion far before worldly advantages. It made them very sad when dear Mary married a man who had been brought up chapel instead of church; but that was nothing to what their horror would have been if they had known her son was to marry a Papist, — for at least Nonconformists are good straightforward Bible Christians, — and they had a great horror of Popish ways. What are you smiling at?'

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'I was only thinking of a quotation.'

'What quotation?'

' "*See how these Christians love one another*," ' he said softly.

She looked at him startled, and he returned the look with that half-mocking, half-tender smile.

'Dear Aunt Milly, you know how my father brought me up?'

'Alas! yes. To be no better than a heathen. I'm afraid he believed in nothing.'

'There you are wrong. He used to quote Voltaire. "To believe in God is difficult; to disbelieve in him is ridiculous." '

'I never dared ask him what he believed,' said Aunt Milly sadly.

'He believed that there was a great mystery, and that, as Herodotus says, "About the gods one man knows as much as another." '

'But surely Herodotus was a pagan, dear child?' said Aunt Milly, bewildered.

Michael kissed her tenderly.

'And you say my generous, warm-hearted old father was a pagan.'

'I cannot deny he was generous and warm-hearted.'

'Perhaps,' he suggested, 'religion has very little to do with character, after all.'

'Oh, my dear! It has everything to do with it. But you share your poor father's opinions.'

'No,' said Michael. 'I've never thought enough about these matters to be entitled to have any opinion at all. That's why I'm open to conviction. The only difference that I can see between your opinion and mine, at present, is that you *think* you

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know something about the Great Mystery, and I *know* that I know nothing.'

'It's your father's fault that you know nothing, not yours,' she sighed.

'Perhaps it was *his* father's fault. My father told me that his boyhood was made miserable in the name of religion. He could hardly speak of it. He never mentioned my grandfather's name without bitterness, though he respected his uprightness. He decided, when my mother died, that he wouldn't have me taught any religion at all, and said I could choose one for myself if I wanted one, when I was old enough.'

'It's too true. Never shall I forget when you were brought home to England, such a dear little boy, but so dreadfully pale; and they said you had had a sunstroke, which must have been carelessness somewhere; and then you were allowed to catch cold directly after you landed, and your father took me to see you lying ill with bronchitis at that grand hotel, with half a dozen servants to wait on you — how horrified I was to find you'd never been taught to say your prayers.'

'I remember. I'm sure you tried to teach me.'

'Till you father interfered. But you were a wilful little boy. When I wanted you to say your hymn, "Now I lay me down to sleep," you insisted on saying "Now I lay me down to cough," which was like being profane, even at that age.'

'I had a passion for truth as opposed to sentiment.'

'You never had a chance,' she repeated, shaking her head.

'And now that I am to be given one, you would take it away from me if you could.'

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'Oh, Michael! Don't say that, my dear.'

'Isn't it true? Don't you see how puzzling it is for a poor outsider — that taking Christianity alone, and ignoring all the other great Religions that are professed by the vast majority of the human race all over the world ——'

'My darling, people who are not Christians must be heathens,' said Aunt Milly, piteously.

'Let us leave it at that, dear,' said Michael, gently, 'since we are concerned only with your desire that I should believe what you believe, and with my Winefride's and Bernard's desire that I should believe what they believe. Don't you see how puzzling it is for a poor outsider,' he repeated, 'that you should all think so differently? You whom he knows to be so good, so conscientious, so much more in earnest than he could ever be. *My* father, and *his* father, your father, and Winefride's brother — and each of you is or was persuaded that he only is right, and all the others wrong.'

'It is a pity,' said poor Aunt Milly, 'a pity everyone cannot think alike. But after all, as you say,' she brightened up, 'we *are* all Christians, and even if we do not all love and understand one another aright in this world, I hope we shall in the next.'

'If that is so, what can it matter what kind of a Christian I become?' he said, smiling.

'I can't explain — I can't argue — I know it does matter,' she said, shaking her head.

'Dear Aunt Milly, that is what Winefride thinks. She believes that it matters so much that my salvation depends upon what kind of a Christian I become. And her happiness in this life certainly

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depends upon it. That is why I am going to see Father de Bronville this evening.'

'Father de Bronville! A Romish priest!'

'The brother of my Winefride's father is a Jesuit priest, and I am going to see him to-night.'

'Why not see a good honest clergyman, and let him try to talk you over first?' cried Aunt Milly.

'Because that would hardly facilitate my marriage with Winefride.'

'Then you're anxious to be converted simply because you're in love?'

'That's about it,' he agreed, cheerfully.

'But, my dearest boy! You will never bring yourself, surely, to swallow the Pope?' cried Aunt Milly, wringing her hands.

He threw back his head and laughed so heartily that she was almost reassured.

'The Pope would be one of the least of my difficulties.'

'To call a mortal man infallible?' she cried.

'Be calm, my darling. You're not a cricketer.'

'What has that got to do with it? How could I be a cricketer? You poke fun at me,' said Aunt Milly, almost crying, 'but I'm in earnest.'

'So am I in earnest,' said Michael, coaxingly. 'What I mean is that you can't play any game without an umpire, and the decision of that umpire must be final. In other words the players must all consent to assume that he is infallible by agreeing to accept his decision without dispute. Otherwise chaos. Any fellow who plays games would understand that all right.'

'But religion isn't a game, dear child.'

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'Call it warfare against evil,' he suggested. 'But even in war there must be a commander-in-chief, who must be obeyed without question. You wouldn't have the rank and file hopping in with suggestions, would you?'

'I don't like metaphors, Michael, and never did. I am easily confused and don't pretend to be able to argue,' said Aunt Milly, 'and I can't understand what your difficulties in our straightforward simple faith *can* be, if you find it so easy to believe in the Pope. Surely you must have sometimes felt the *need* of a religion?'

'I cannot conscientiously say that I have.'

'Conscientiously! But why should you have a conscience?'

'I suppose it is an instinct developed by civilisation,' he said, smiling.

'It is an instinct implanted by God. And without religion, without any certainty of future reward or punishment, I cannot understand why you should be good at all. If God has not forbidden it, what is to keep us from sinning as we choose?'

'Dear Aunt Milly, that is not an argument. You might as well ask me why I should wash if God has not forbidden me to be unclean. I wash because I am sufficiently civilised to wish to be healthy and clean and comfortable in body, just as I try to be an honourable man, because I am sufficiently civilised to wish to be healthy and clean in mind. Civilisation and experience have taught us all to be ashamed of meanness or deceit or lying or immorality, because they have proved degrading to the character of the individual, and disastrous to the well-being of the community.'

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'But there is so little consolation ——'

'The consolation of a clear conscience — the knowledge that one has tried to do one's duty by one's fellow-creatures — ought to be enough reward for anyone,' he said loftily.

'But it isn't. It may be now. You are so young,' she said, sighing and smiling.

'I didn't say *I* had that consolation,' he said hastily. 'I said it ought to be enough. And as for being young — I am six and twenty.'

'What is that? Six and twenty! In perfect health, good-looking, courted, flattered, colossally rich ——'

'I have had my disappointments, my disillusions.'

'But you have a thousand hopes and illusions left. It is when sorrow comes — pain — helplessness — old age — but most of all sorrow,' she cried.

'My father's death ——'

'Ah, dear boy! A natural grief. That is not the shipwreck of your life.' Aunt Milly's brown eyes grew tragic. 'The loss of your hopes.' She wiped away a quiet tear. 'Look at me, with nothing in the world to look forward to — and all those I loved most — on the other side. Poor, plain, old, lonely, yet happy as a queen because I love God, and believe in His promise that I shall see them again in Heaven. Only waiting here contented, because I know it can't be for so very much longer that I shall have to wait — here where nobody loves me, nor wants me.'

'I love you, darling, *I* want you. Have I not come to you for sympathy now?' said Michael.

'Dear, kind boy! I am not ungrateful, but what am I to you? We talk a different language. I am only a funny little dull old-fashioned auntie to you, though I was all the world to someone — once. A

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pretty girl with eyes like stars, and a summer hat covered with roses, and a face like a rose beneath it,' she sobbed incoherently — 'but you shan't come to me for sympathy in vain. Tell me about her. You love her. But does she love you?'

He coloured all over his clear brown skin.

'Dear Aunt Milly! To you I may say, yes, I believe with all my heart that she loves me.'

'Then thank God for that. It is a great responsibility for you — and for her — poor young thing, the charge of such a great fortune.'

'Will you share the responsibility?' Michael rose, and came close to her side, and stood looking down upon her with that ready laugh illuminating his brown eyes and pleasant face. 'Let me do what you would never let my father do, and make a settlement on you.'

'Never.'

'Come, just a pinch of gold-dust,' he said mischievously, 'a mere ten thousand pounds.'

'I hold my independence dearer than that.'

'Fifty, then. A hundred thousand! Think what a lot of good you could do with it. That is what everybody says who asks me for money.'

'God never asked me to do good with your money,' she said, shaking her head. 'I give what I can of my own.'

He thought of her little income, between two and three hundred a year, all told, and looked upon her tenderly and even reverently.

'I am sure you do.'

'And you believe in your Winefride,' she said, reverting to the subject uppermost in their minds, 'if in nothing else?'

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'I believe in my Winefried, and in a great many people and things besides; but most of all in her.'

'And she won't marry you unless you become a Catholic?'

'She will never marry me unless I become a Catholic.'

'But Catholics marry Protestants every day.'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'Is it because she is so very devout?'

'Perhaps. I only know that neither her mother, who is rather inclined to be narrow-minded and bigoted from my point of view; nor her aunt, who is supposed to be rather worldly from their point of view; nor her brother, who is my dearest friend on earth; nor her uncle, who is a priest and cares more for the interests of the Church than for all his relations put together; nor old Mr. de Bronville, who is the head of one of the oldest and poorest families in Christendom, would let her marry me, if they could help it, unless I became a Catholic. Nor would she consent to do it if they were all for it instead of against it. She is very soft, my Winefride, but very indomitable. And she is wearing herself out on her knees, day and night, in that beautiful chapel — which is the only part of their old Castle that isn't half in ruins — praying for my poor unworthy soul.'

He turned to the window to hide his emotion, and putting aside the cheap lace curtain, looked out into the spring sunshine which had conquered the rain, and was flooding the little mean street.

'Oh, my dear, dear boy, I can't deny I have hated Roman Catholics ever since I was a little girl, and was frightened by the pictures of giants Pope and Pagan

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in the "Pilgrim's Progress"; but I will try not to be prejudiced against them more than I can help, for your sake, for how could I possibly hate *you*?'

'Having no religion, you see, I never learnt to hate anybody,' he said with a twinkle, 'and you certainly needn't begin to hate me yet — because ——'

'Because?'

'Because, though I am so willing, so eager, to share the faith for which my Winefride would lay down her life,' he said, very quietly and sadly, 'I can't profess it unless I *do* believe it. And they've yet got to convince me — that it's true.'

CHAPTER IV

MICHAEL'S interview with Father de Bronville proved so satisfactory that he was eager to communicate the result to his betrothed, and accordingly indulged his impulse to visit her, and his desire to make the journey to Wales by automobile, at one and the same time.

Such an expedition was at that time — when motors were yet a novelty, and breakdowns not only probable, but almost certain — something of an adventure in itself, and the young man consequently looked forward to it with the more pleasure.

He had no scruple in starting for Aberfraw without giving a hint of his intention to Lady Gryffydd.

The Castle belonged to young Sir Bernard, who had given him a standing invitation to visit it whenever he chose; and it is to be feared that the

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absence of Bernard's mother strengthened Michael's desire to avail himself of this invitation on the present occasion.

As he drew near the home of Winefride and recognised the landmarks which for her sake had become dear to him — and which were indeed the landmarks of the only spot in the British Isles where he felt himself to be at home — his heart swelled with a feeling akin to gratitude.

His wander-years had been many in proportion to his age, and the instinct which bids youth seek change and adventure had been early gratified.

It was the unknown which attracted him, and this curious hidden retired family life was strange and new to Michael.

The mingled beauty and melancholy of Welsh scenery could not but appeal to one so susceptible of impression.

During his previous visits to Aberfraw he had made many expeditions with his friend and his friend's sister. Bernard was something of an antiquarian, and was besides an enthusiast for his own neighbourhood and country.

He pointed out Roman remains where Michael beheld only grassy hillocks and strangely shaped rocks; the bare and frowning hills, crowned with crumbling towers, were to Bernard historic battlefields haunted by ghosts of forgotten warriors. The ruins, ivy-grown, that stood upon the banks of salmon-abounding rivers, were to him sacred relics of a past when the 'faire Abbayes of Wales' were sung by many minstrels. To his boyish imagination those half-perished cloisters were thronged yet by the reproachful shades of the monks, surveying

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the destruction which had overtaken their patient handiwork, and watching the thoughtless tourist tripping across those holy places, where the incense of their prayers had risen; or holding picnics in the grass-grown aisles where sandalled feet had once moved in measured procession over consecrated ground.

Michael loved the grim mountain passes of the north; the lonely grey heights curtained almost perpetually in white mist or purple cloud or driving rain; the rushing torrents; the rough walls of stone marking rude boundaries for the mountain sheep across the fine short grass forever swept and sweetened by the wind; and the light tossing delicate foliage of the weeping silver birch, with gnarled and whitened slender stems leaning above the heather. But no less he loved the rich and restful valleys of South Wales, where the hills are softly clothed in greenest leafage, dotted with the dark and solitary yew, that sees the forest trees rise and fall beneath man's hand, and dwells in her ancient places unmolested through the years; where the rivers flow in deep serenity between banks of red earth, and the fat orchards swell with blossom and fruit, giving birth to the mistletoe on mossy branches of seasoned apple-trees; and where little white cottage homes send up thin curls of blue wood-smoke against the dark evergreen of summer woods, or the bronze and gold of autumn and winter boughs.

Bernard traced many a dumb record left by Roman legion, Welsh prince, Saxon abbot, and Norman monarch; but Michael saw only the peace and the beauty of the landscape, and his heart leaped within him, as his car turned a blind corner of the winding

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road leading into that open valley, which was guarded by the frowning keep of Castell Aberfraw.

The passing of the motor along this high road through the village attracted a good deal of attention, for the villagers were not yet accustomed to this form of locomotion; and as the machine made its noisy and groaning progress, emitting puffs of smoke and leaving in its wake a most unpleasing odour and a trail of dropping oil, the inhabitants rushed to their doors, animadverting audibly on the snorting monster which covered their little gardens with white dust, and obliged them to call their children in terror from their loitering on the highway.

An immense hedge of rhododendron bordered the winding approach to the Castle, and the density of coming blossom was heralded by innumerable buds. Solid rock, draped in ivy and climbing periwinkle, walled the drive on the left, and showed it to be but a cutting on the mountain side.

Half-way up the steep ascent the motor stuck, and Michael left his chauffeur, aided by his servant, to cope with the situation as best they could, and himself went lightly up the hill on foot, arriving presently on the plateau whereon the Castle stood, and walking out upon the terrace garden, where Winefride was usually to be found at this hour of the afternoon, for which, as far as possible, he had timed his arrival.

There he found her, gazing from the grass-grown ramparts upon the panorama below, and upon the white clouds chasing each other across the pure blue of an April sky; whilst heavier grey ones stole over the opposite hills in their wake, and threatened passing showers.

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The river, which had its rise among the bleak distant mountains, calmed itself from a foaming torrent into a broad even glassy stream, as it rolled through the cultivated country which stretched away to the horizon on the left; while on the right it wound its tortuous way to the sea between the dipping wooded hills, and was lost as a silver thread in the mist of distance.

The season was unusually late even for these comparatively high regions, and the almond trees, still in their glory, lifted fairy wands of rosy blossom against a brown background of bare wood.

Below in the valley, the meadows and orchards were spread as a rich verdant covering over the red earth, but the ramparts of Aberfraw sprang from a steep slope of grass, here and there rent by mighty boulders and sharp rocks, and affording little or no foothold for the gathering of the primroses now opening in their thousands to the spring sunshine.

The ornamental stone balustrade was broken and half-ruined, and from the ruins sprang the white of the stone-crop, here known as 'snow-on-the-mountain,' and sweet wallflowers with red-gold hearts, and pennywort and hardy fern; and the terrace itself was gay with the daffodil, the narcissus, and the red, white and blue hyacinth; while in sheltered corners early magnolias held up transparent purple-veined cups of blossom.

Michael stood still for one moment as he caught sight of that uncovered golden head and slight figure. Then he called Winefride softly by a little name known only to him and her, and went towards her as she turned and uttered a low startled cry of amaze and welcome.

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'Michael! You appear like a fairy prince on a wishing carpet! There is no train due for hours. I was watching the goods train labouring along the little toy line down there, and wishing it could have brought you from London.'

'I knew you would be wishing it, so I came at once,' he said, smiling. 'But I have startled you, and brought the colour to your face.' He stooped to kiss the slender hands she held out to him, and she blushed rosily and said:

'Come into the fountain garden. But wait — you must want some luncheon.'

'No, no, I had a meal and a wash a couple of hours ago. I wanted to get here just at this time when I knew you would be standing here, looking over the ramparts, and thinking of me as you promised.'

'Oh, Michael! I know now how you came here. In one of those dangerous horrid things. And all the way from London. You must have been days on your journey. No wonder I didn't get a letter yesterday. Did you have many breakdowns, and are you all shaken to pieces, poor boy? And oh! Michael, *have* you seen Mamma?'

'Let us come, as you said, into the fountain garden, and I will answer all your questions, and tell you all about everything,' he said, looking down upon her with laughing eyes of love and gladness.

She put her hand into his, and led him across the sunny terrace; though the coming and going of the vivid colour in her fair face belied the sedateness of her step.

Winefride was one and twenty, but her extreme fairness made her appear younger.

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She was tall, and slight almost to fragility, with the short oval face and rounded features of a child. Her complexion was transparently delicate, and her flaxen hair had upon it that glint of pure gold which only youth and health and sunshine lend to flaxen hair. Her blue eyes were sweet and candid in expression, and fringed with lashes neither brown nor gold, but of an intermediate tint.

Michael's glance rested tenderly upon her, yet noting every detail of her appearance, from the crowning glory of her hair to the shabbiness of the home-made blue serge gown, that for all its want of fashion could not disguise the grace of her pretty slight figure, as the worn leather shoes could not hide the slenderness of those little feet. As he looked upon his love, this young prince of African gold and diamonds felt his pulses quicken, not only with the joy of meeting, but with pleasure in the thought of all that he could bestow upon this dowerless maiden.

The brown hand, held in that gentle clasp, trembled with its owner's sudden impatience of the difficulties which at once stood between himself and the consummation of his desire, and increased that desire tenfold.

The moment they were fairly within the shelter of the high shrubberies that surrounded the fountain garden, he stopped and took his betrothed into his arms, and said almost in an agony:

'Promise me you will never be persuaded to give me up.'

'I will never be persuaded,' she said instantly, but her tone was troubled. 'What has happened, dear Michael?'

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'Nothing much,' he smiled down upon her, but his arms did not relax their hold, though she made a gentle movement of protest. 'Only now that I see you again, my darling, you are so very lovely that I got a sudden panic lest you should turn into an angel before my very eyes, and fly away from me.'

'That is not all,' she said, shaking her head, 'there is something more.'

'Yes, you are right. There is something more. Some playful old gossip has been recounting tales of my unworthiness to your mother.'

'That was why Mamma went to London so suddenly. She wouldn't tell Bernard and me the reason.'

Winefride looked anxiously but trustfully into his face.

'Is it — anything very serious?'

'Nothing, my sweet, that need separate us. Nothing that you do not already know in substance and in fact, though I have spared you detail; but it led me to seek Father de Bronville.'

'You went to see Uncle Joseph? And what did he say?'

'What did he say? He said a great many things.' Michael smiled at the recollection. 'His outspokenness and simplicity were as refreshing as ever. He said, very cheerfully, that no doubt I had been a great sinner ——'

'How exactly you have got him,' said Winefride, with a little low laugh, 'dear faithful Uncle Joe.'

'—— but that to the grace of God all things were possible, and that I had now seen the error of my ways, and was willing to humble myself, and put

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myself in the way of hearing — the truth — in order to become worthy of marrying you. And therefore, he said, no one had any right to suppose I should not become in the end a good Catholic and a good man.'

'Oh, Michael — you will — you will ——' she whispered, clinging to him.

'I will be — a good man to the best of my ability,' he said, always with that faint twinkle as though of amusement at his own earnestness, 'and I'll put myself in the way, as he said, of becoming all you wish. That is the reason, or, I should say, the excuse for my visit — to tell you I am going to him for instruction directly after Easter.'

'Oh, Michael!' The radiance of her fair face touched him, and he kissed her with a tenderness almost reverent.

'Why should I make all this fuss? Why shouldn't I do just whatever you like? I, who have no strong opinions of my own — only the vaguest, the most indifferent? I, who care so little for anything else in the world so long as I can get you,' he said, shrugging his shoulders. 'Why — why? I can't think — and yet ——'

'Oh, Michael, you *must* have an opinion. You are a man, you are not a child. How can you go on all your life not caring, not thinking ——'

'I suppose I should have done that, you know, if I hadn't met you. I suppose I was born so,' he said whimsically. 'And if I *did* begin thinking and reasoning — something tells me' — his brown eyes looked into those guileless blue ones with an expression at once melancholy and humorous — 'something tells me that — that way madness lies,'

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he said, ending his quotation with the little laugh she knew so well. 'Oh, it's all very well up here, on this hill which lies so close to heaven, and where my angel dwells' — his arm tightened its clasp — 'I could believe anything up here on these heights of romance, or among those old Norman arches where my Saint Winefride prays for me.'

'Ah, Michael, I am not your angel; your guardian angel is praying for you too,' she sighed, 'if you would believe it. And perhaps your mother's spirit ——'

'Ah! there you have a powerful argument.' His voice softened.

'I believe she sent you to me,' Winefride whispered, 'her little boy who was never taught even to say his prayers.'

'I know you have evolved that pretty fancy, and I like you to believe it, and oddly enough my liking *you* to believe it is to me another argument. The thought of myself without any religion is quite a pleasant thought. Agreeable because I am used to it, and because I hate taking trouble. But the thought of you without a faith! What horror!'

She looked at him very tenderly and wistfully, longing to say so much, and yet chary of words. For she knew him to be cleverer than herself, and was even a little afraid of that laugh which had so often exasperated Lady Gryffydd. Winefride had more perception than her mother, but humour was nevertheless not her strong point, and often she wondered secretly why Michael was so easily amused, seldom divining the cause of that twinkle deplored by Lady Gryffydd, but dear to herself because it was so salient a characteristic of the man she loved.

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She was very young, and had seen few men — and of those few none were of a kind to be particularly attractive to her; it was therefore natural that she should regard Michael as the most wonderful of created beings.

That he could sing at sight, and in a fine clear baritone, the church music which she and Bernard struggled through with such difficulty and so little tunefulness; that he should be a better shot and a better horseman than her cherished brother, who excelled his friend in no single accomplishment save that of fly-fishing; that he should speak French, German, and Italian almost as well as his mother-tongue; that he should be so tall and athletic, so good-looking and good-natured, so little vain of his attainments, his person, or his wealth — all these things inspired and glorified her opinion of Michael, and caused her to look upon his adoration of herself as a crowning miracle.

To be worthy of him was her daily and nightly prayer, but above all, to be worthy of the great task for which she believed herself to be selected by heaven, of being permitted to hold, in her humble hand, the torch that was to light this beloved soul, hitherto wandering in darkness, to the path which led to God.

Had Michael known, — nay, vaguely, he did know, for Love is a great diviner, — it was not only when she knelt in the chapel that Winefride prayed for him.

Her life was a prayer. As she moved about the ill-lit corridors, and beneath the round archways of her strange and ancient birthplace — as she rose from her white bed, to look through the narrow

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lancet windows of the tower in which she slept, upon each new day as it dawned over river and mountain — as she gathered the spring blossoms upon the flowering hill-sides in the sunshine — as she climbed the steep rocky ways to visit many humble friends of all her life, or passed gravely through the chain of dark echoing vaulted muniment rooms that led to the tribune of the Chapel — her thoughts were prayers; pleadings that his soul might be given to her supplication; prayers sometimes instinct with hope and joy, sometimes tremulous and mournful, but wholly sincere and piteous offerings of her own life and happiness, in order to obtain this great boon for him she loved so innocently, and so infinitely more than she loved herself.

The atmosphere of Castell Aberfraw was attractive to Michael, for the beauty of poverty was here presented to him for the first time; of its ugliness he had seen much and heard more; and his experience had taught him the value that is wisely attached to wealth, without including the further wisdom of its worthlessness.

Love had touched the half-closed eyes with which, figuratively, he had blundered through the days of his youth, — and opened those eyes a little wider; they perceived at least one goal; and aimlessness gave place to purpose.

Always restful, the absence of its garrulous mistress rendered the interior of the Castell idyllic in its peace. Michael found happiness in the presence of his love and in the company of his friend.

The services Bernard could render to him were offered not only willingly, but eagerly.

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He resembled his sister in colouring, but he was built on a much larger scale, and his features were cast in a more aquiline mould; but if his expression were less childish than hers, the regard of his blue eyes was not less guileless, holding also something of the mysticism of the dreamer and the enthusiast.

The brother and sister vied with each other in waiting on their guest, reminding each other anxiously of his tastes and endeavouring by every means in their power to gratify them.

It was characteristic of Michael's natural breeding that he did not make their willing service embarrassing either to himself or to them by any protests, but accepted it with equal simplicity.

The clumsy serving-maid clattered over the stone floor of the dining hall in the wake of the old Irish butler, who gave her angry and audible directions; and it touched Michael to see the anxious looks exchanged between his youthful host and hostess when the dishes were set upon the table, and the relief of their smiles when the contents of those dishes proved palatable.

Earlier, he had seen Winefride flitting in the direction of the kitchens while she left him to the conversation of her brother, and he loved her so dearly that the thought of her care for his material comfort brought tears to his eyes. He observed that a slender portion of fish made up the whole extent of her meal and Bernard's, while he was regaled with such variety of flesh and fowl as the Castell larder could furnish at short notice.

'I who care so little what I eat and drink,' he thought, with tender amusement, though he had as

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healthy an appetite as any young man of six and twenty need wish to possess.

But he felt himself a man of the world and one of vast experience beside his host, who was so much younger and simpler than he, and who looked up to him with such profound admiration. Michael found Bernard's enthusiastic regard exceedingly pleasant, for like many sensitive persons, he desired intensely the good opinion of those with whom he found himself in sympathy.

He craved unconsciously to be made much of for something besides his wealth, and he did not make the mistake of suspecting these penniless young patricians of esteeming him the more because he had great possessions; but neither did he realise that the glamour of his riches must necessarily add to the brilliancy of the light in which Bernard and Winefride beheld him.

CHAPTER V

After dinner the trio walked out upon the terrace for a short time, but the air of the April evening was chilly enough to make even the lovers glad to return to the warmth of the library, which was the usual sitting-room of the family.

It was a square and lofty saloon, lined with musty leather volumes to the very ceiling, with high galleries running round the top shelves, and below, doors carefully concealed by sham books. But though the room was too large to be snug, it was at least free from the draughts of the great stone hall; and with tall heavy screens arranged to shelter the

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roomy old-fashioned chairs and sofas about the open fireplace, it formed the most habitable portion of the Castle.

Bernard occupied himself at a distant writing-table, bending over a great farm ledger, under the light of an ill-trimmed and rather odorous paraffin lamp; while Michael and Winefride sat side by side on the couch close to the chimney corner. After an interval of blissful silence, they talked over their plans in low voices.

'We won't look at the wrong side of the picture to-night. We will suppose Uncle Joseph has worked the miracle and converted me into the most bigoted Papist in Christendom,' said Michael, in that tone of light mockery, belied by the kindness of his glance, which was characteristic of him. 'We will then suppose we are safely married, you and I' — he stopped to kiss the little hand he held — 'and sitting on this very sofa to discuss our future. What would your wishes be — your hopes — the very wildest dream you ever dreamed — that you would whisper to your husband, and expect him to gratify?'

'Oh, Michael! When you talk like that you put everything out of my head,' she murmured, and flushed all over her fair face and brow, 'you must not take it all for granted so.'

'Why not? You have promised to marry me, on certain conditions.'

'If you would fulfil those conditions I should have nothing left to wish for.'

"I have promised to try. What more can I do? I am going to give myself every chance, since you think it matters so much what my little soul, among all the myriads of souls, believes.'

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'It matters infinitely to that soul, and to those who love that soul — oh, so dearly. Beyond everything and everyone else on earth, I am afraid.'

'Is it not your duty to love your husband beyond everything on earth? Well — I will not talk so you don't wish it, if it alarms you so much,' he said, smiling, 'but let us take for granted that all that is settled satisfactorily, and decide how you would wish to order the days of our married life. First of all — there is Bernard.'

Her blue eyes sought his with tender questioning.

'What could we do for Bernard? You know his dearest wish? Only you and I know it in the world, I think, and perhaps the monk whose favourite he was at Downside. When he told me of it in Rome, I thought he was a fanatic. I tried to laugh him out of it, but now that I have been here I understand. It is curious when one really knows people and learns their point of view, how reasonable things become that seemed unreasonable. How apt one is to condemn from prejudice, and without personal knowledge oneself; while observing the absurdity of others who regard those who differ from them in opinion as abnormal. Do you mind my prosing away like this — thinking aloud?'

Winefride did not mind; she smiled at him serenely.

'It is such a pity everyone cannot think alike,' she said, as simply as Aunt Milly had uttered the same regret.

"I am old enough to know that people condemn those who differ from them in opinion, with a vehemence exactly proportioned to their ignorance,' said Michael. 'They have never learned to look

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on the other side. I would like to see both sides of every question clearly and at once.'

'But you are asking an impossibility. If you look at both sides at once you wouldn't see anything clearly; it would result in a blur,' said Winefride. It would be better to look at them separately and make up your mind which is the best side, and be loyal to that.' Though her words were playful, her tone was anxious.

'We drift back always to that topic,' he said discontentedly, 'or you lead me back by artful devious ways.'

'It is the most interesting one in the world,' she murmured apologetically.

'Yes, that is true; the question of man's future. Yet — but let us return to Bernard. The best plan would be for you and me to rent this old Castle from him, on a long lease.'

'And live here! Oh, Michael!'

'Well, part of the year — as long as you liked. It would give us an excuse without offending him for putting it in order. We would restore everything that could be restored without spoiling it.'

'I could make the chapel so beautiful,' she murmured, hardly above her breath.

'The chapel! But that has had all the attention,' he said. 'I should insist on the Castle getting its share. It would be very tempting to utilise your magnificent waterfall for the installation of electric light; only then the vision of you moving about these dim corridors with your little lamp in your hand, would vanish, and that is the vision I always see when I am away from you — the memory of you that I carried away from that first night I spent

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here. When I saw you come down that weird staircase into the hall, shading the lamp with your little transparent hand, lest the draught should extinguish it — and throwing thus the light upwards upon your golden hair, that was like a halo about your sweet face ——'

'Oh, Michael, hush ——'

'Why should I hush? It was a beautiful picture for a man to carry about in his heart. And I asked and was told you slept at the top of that grim stone tower like a fairy princess, and were not afraid.'

'Thekla sleeps up there too when she is at home.'

'When am I going to see Thekla, and what is she like? I picture a dear plump little schoolgirl with a pigtail.'

Winefride smiled.

'You will see her in the summer when she leaves school for good. Perhaps our wedding will be then! Michael, will you come with me this evening,' she whispered, 'into the chapel? You know I visit the Blessed Sacrament every night before I go to bed. I would like you to come and kneel there beside me this once ——'

'This once?'

'Oh, that it might be the first of many times.' She hid her face against his shoulder.

'Of course, I will come,' he said, infinitely moved. 'Poor little thing. You are figuring to yourself that there may be grace to be found even for the poor unbeliever, coming to kneel in that holy place.'

'If he be not wilful — not wilful in his disbelief, she cried wistfully. 'But you never had a chance ——'

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He almost started, recalling his aunt's words.

'No home, no family,' she went on, 'brought up to believe there was nothing beyond this world.'

'Not that; but to believe that we *know* nothing beyond this world,' he said gently.

'Oh Michael, but if I could prove it to you? How gladly would I die for that.'

'I believe you, my angel. But for God's sake don't speak of dying. If I lost you now — I should go mad. Just when I've found anchor — harbour — peace of mind.'

'We should meet — later.'

'A pale shadowy hope to help me through the long years of life which might lie before me, unless I ended it all by shooting myself,' he said vehemently, and then laughed. 'We are growing rather tragic, sweetheart. You forget that we are by way of supposing that all is well with me. That we are married, and living here, and the Castle restored, and Bernard ——'

'What of Bernard? I hear my own name,' said the young man from his distant corner. 'You should not speak so loud, Michael.'

'I had forgotten you were there. You were so still.'

'I am wrestling with my accounts,' said Bernard absently, and he bent again over his ledger.

Michael looked affectionately at the boy's clear-cut refined profile, silhouetted against the faint illumination of the lamp. He lowered his voice.

'We will suppose that we are superlatively, ideally happy; and that Bernard is indulging his dream of rebuilding your wonderful twelfth-century Abbey in the grove —'

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'It would be you who would do it, not Bernard.'

'The idea was his — the hope is his. We should only supply the means.'

'Oh Michael, how good you are.'

'It is not goodness. From a mere poetic sense of justice I should like to see the poor old fellows who built those massive walls and arches, triumphing over the senseless Philistines who tore their beautiful work to pieces. I should like to watch the upraising of the stones into the places where their patient, toiling hands set them so long ago. It would also give me a purely æsthetic pleasure to see their white-robed successors moving among the mistletoe boughs of their own orchards; dwelling on the lands their predecessors cultivated and planted in these wild regions. I should like to hear the brethren chanting in those same aisles again, that we would leave untouched wherever it was possible, though we must dig up those old round pillars half buried in grass. After all, the Abbey restored, as we should restore it, would certainly add to the picturesqueness of the valley; and I suppose, if the monks do no particular good, they do no particular harm, so I don't see why anyone should object.'

'It is difficult for me to understand how anyone, who believes in prayer at all, can help believing also that for holy men and women to devote themselves to praying for those who cannot or will not pray for themselves, must be good,' she said simply. 'It would be very, very wonderful if the Cistercians really came here again.'

'I am afraid it would take time to get their monastery ready for them, even with an army of

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workmen, and the best architect one could find to direct them.'

'And how much of your money would it take?'

'A great, great sum,' he said smiling, 'to do it as I would wish to do it. But nothing compared to the whole. If it cost half a million pounds, Winefride, we should still be rich.'

'And Bernard dreamed of doing it alone,' she exclaimed.

'Not on that scale! And besides, it need not cost anything like that,' Michael hastened to say. 'I was joking. And as for Bernard, he spoke of it as a visionary speaks of a fond dream.'

'Yet, through you, the dream might come true,' she said wonderingly. 'It must make one almost afraid to be so rich as that. But then — you were born to it, you have never known anything else.'

'No, I have never known anything else. But I suppose I have wondered now and then what I ought to do with my money, or some of it. It hasn't been mine very long, you know. It was my father's till last year.'

'Poor Michael.'

'He told me that of late years it had grown so much that it almost frightened him,' said Michael. 'I remember laughing at him because at the same time it seemed to me that he was more frightened still of losing any of it. He was for ever withdrawing capital from South Africa and placing it in one country or another because he saw trouble brewing. He thought it was my courage and my better education that made me laugh at him, poor old Dad; but I know now it was merely my ignorance and

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my conceit. His death brought many things home to me; my selfishness, and the little return I had ever made to him for all — everything — he had done for me. My secret sense of superiority in knowledge and breeding — God help me! Poor, useless, aimless wandering fool — good to spend his money, while he worked like a man to earn it, and justified his existence and took his place among his fellow-creatures like a man.'

'You will do the same,' she said, with shining eyes.

'Shall I? I think I have played the fool too long,' he said. 'Sport has been my hard work, and frivolity my recreation. I believe I'm naturally idle — a born loafer — and yet — how tired I've often found myself. Bored stiff hunting for amusement. I know all about the taste of dust and ashes. Young! I feel a hundred years old when I talk to Bernard, and to you, my sweet.'

'Perhaps that is because I am not clever enough to be a companion to you, to talk to you and share your thoughts,' she said diffidently.

Michael kissed her hand to reassure her, but even as he did so he realized rather curiously that this reflection had never crossed his mind.

He thought of her as his ideal maiden; his queen; his saint; to be set on a pedestal, to be worshipped and defended; honoured by every offering wealth or affection could provide — but not as a companion with whom he could exchange ideas, and to whom he could unveil his thoughts. Rather must he keep them carefully to himself lest he should offend this little one whose faith was so absolute, and whose innocent love for himself was not only to be

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reverenced, but to be preserved in so far as he, unworthy, could hope to preserve it, by striving to hide rather than to reveal his real self from her guileless eyes.

'Don't look pitiful, my sweetheart. I do not often fall into moods, and I am usually only too well pleased with myself and with life in general, only sometimes, vaguely, comes that mental discontent — and then your love will charm it away. I don't want you to understand — I don't want you to be clever — I only want you to love me —' this he said sincerely, and not in the least realising, since he had not experienced it, the strain which a daily close companionship, which does not include mental affinity and understanding, must place upon a sensitive mind.

'But I want to help you,' she murmured.

'To what? What am I to do? There was a moment when I, even I, wanted to work. I got it into my head when I was a lad — I suppose I must have inherited the taste, and I had one or two close friends among the German medical students — that I would be a doctor. They said I had the ideal surgeon's hand.' He held out his brown hand, with its slender nervous fingers, and supple wrists, half laughing and half shuddering. 'But my father wouldn't hear of it. He said the fancy would die away, and time has proved his wisdom. And I don't know that I am keen on working at anything now. Life is very pleasant, even as it is. And when *you* belong to me — it might be ideal. I don't know what more I want, after all.'

'God will show you presently,' she said, 'when you have found — the truth.'

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'Why should *I* hope to find what so many have sought in vain?' he said, impatiently, and repented as her blue eyes grew distressed.

'Dear Michael, you promised!'

'If you were once safely my wife,' he said, relapsing into the coaxing tones of a boy, 'I should be much better able to concentrate my mind on the search for truth.'

'Michael, when you speak so lovingly to me, and your dear eyes laugh at me, my heart is so filled with love and — and — longing — that I cannot utter all I feel,' she faltered. 'But you know that I should believe I was doing wrong, so that I could not be happy.'

'You don't trust me. You think my chief incentive to search for truth would be gone if I once held you fast?'

Her fair face burnt.

'I cannot tell. I only know I must not. Something tells me I must not. It is quite apart from all that is said to me by others. Bernard, whom I have always loved best in the world, until you came into my life, feels it as I do. We both know I cannot marry you unless you become one of us. Yet you are Bernard's dearest friend, and I could never marry any man but you.'

'Don't you see how you tempt me to become one of you without bothering myself about thinking it out at all? To say, What has been good enough for thousands of better and wiser men than I may surely be good enough for me? To accept it all as a matter of form?' he said jestingly.

She shook her head.

'If you could do that you would not be the man

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I know you to be. The *real* Michael Ferrys could not profess what he did not believe.'

'The Michael Ferrys *you* know?'

'That is the real one,' she said calmly.

'I wonder.'

There was a movement from the writing-table, and Bernard rose, stretched his limbs, pushed his fair hair from his weary forehead, and closed his ledger.

'Have you finished talking yet?' he asked, 'or would you ever finish talking, if one never interrupted you?'

'Is it late?' said Winefride, in startled tones.

'Half-past ten. Late for us.'

'How the time has flown; but you two have had no talk at all. Bernard is jealous, Michael, because I keep you all to myself,' she said cheerfully, 'but I will go to bed now, and leave you to smoke, and then you can gossip to your hearts' content.'

She crossed to the writing-table and laid her hand on the ledger, recognising her brother's evening of labour almost remorsefully as she bade him good-night.

'Poor Bernard. But you will have your talk with Michael and forget all these dull figures.'

She looked at Michael with a smile, and in silence he followed her from the library and through the echoing stone hall, and matted subway which led to the body of the church.

She took from a row of pegs without the oak door, a square of black lace which she threw over her head and shoulders before entering.

Profound silence and gloom reigned in the chapel, lighted only by the red lamp before the altar.

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Winefride's soft hand sought Michael's, and she led him to a low chair and knelt beside him on the stone floor — a slight motionless form in black gown and veil, with her fair hair and white neck and arms faintly gleaming through the lace.

Michael, too, was motionless. He felt the mysterious glamour of the old, sacred building; the semi-darkness added to the dignity of the ancient round arches, supported by short massive pillars of grey stone, and framing the background of black distance wherein the worn white tombs of many Gryffydds were dimly to be discerned.

Young, impressionable, and ardently in love, he found himself almost involuntarily pleading with the Unknown God that the happiness he craved might be granted to him, that Fate might not be suffered to intervene between him and his love. His thoughts rested upon the innocent beauty of the maiden kneeling beside him; thoughts wholly pure and reverent, filled with regret for his own unworthiness and resolves for the future. . . .

Then he wondered how far the emotion which possessed him was real; how much to be attributed to his instinctive inclination to attune himself to his surroundings.

Yet the silence presently brought to his mind the calm that only silence knows; and the peace of the sanctuary stole over his spirit.

Bernard awaited his guest before the log-fire in the library.

He had placed a little tray of glasses and whisky and seltzer on the elbow-table by the great shabby leather arm-chair in the chimney corner, which faced

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the old-fashioned sofa; and upon the table he had arranged very carefully a little box of cigarettes and lights. The old serving-man had gone to bed.

He watched Michael settle himself luxuriously in the deep arm-chair, and help himself to seltzer water and light a cigarette, and then seated himself on the edge of the opposite couch, with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, and remained silent for some moments.

It was Michael who broke the silence.

'Well, out with it, old man,' he said, kindly.

Bernard smiled.

'You're right. I've got something on my chest,' he said, rather nervously. 'I'm a little afraid of saying it, though. It's one of those things that sound all right to oneself, but sound like cheek when put into words.'

Michael nodded, breathed several smoke rings into the air, and watched them dissolve. Then he said, briefly: 'That's all right, go ahead.'

'There is nobody but I — my father being dead — who would have the right to — to — ask you, but under the circumstances you'll forgive my taking it on myself. It is this. Would you mind — would you hate — I know of course that your name is as much to you as mine is to me — there — I'm beginning at the wrong end,' he stammered.

'Would I mind taking your name when I marry Winefride? Is that what you are trying to say?' said Michael quietly. But he looked surprised, nevertheless, and his dark face flushed slightly.

'I've begun all wrong,' said poor Bernard. 'Of course I've a reason for asking such a thing. Otherwise, as I said, you might well think it confounded

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cheek, my coming to a fellow like you with a name that's known all over the world, and saying, "Look here, you've got to take our religion and even our name, before we can welcome you into our family" — but it's not that, not one bit ——'

'For the Lord's sake, don't explain yourself or excuse yourself any more,' said Michael. 'You're making my head spin. Can't you say what on earth you're driving at?' he added impatiently; for it cannot be denied that some such thought as Bernard described had glanced vaguely across the surface of his mind.

'I spoke to you in Rome,' said the boy, almost timidly, 'of my wish — I ought to have called it my dream ——'

'And I've spoken to you in England of it, and told you that if I live to marry your sister that wish shall be fulfilled,' said Michael, cheerfully.

'Michael! No one but you could ——'

'Shut up.'

'Well, words aren't necessary. You've always been such a fellow for divining one's thoughts,' said Bernard in a choked voice. 'But there's something to be said on my side. You've told me you like this old place ——'

'That's all settled, old man. Winefride and I are going to bully you into letting this house to us, until you're old enough to marry and settle down here yourself, which, if you will take my disinterested advice, you won't do for another ten years at least.'

Bernard smiled happily.

'That is like you. But don't you see that if Winefride marries, and especially if her husband will take the family name — *I* need not?'

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'No, I don't.'

'Your son — Winefride's son — would inherit Aberfraw,' explained Bernard simply. 'It won't be the first time it's descended through the female line. Our family got it originally by marriage with an heiress, so far as that goes. But I always felt one of us ought to marry, and not let the old name die out. And I used to think Winefride and Thekla would both be nuns.'

'God forbid.'

'God has forbidden it, evidently, in Winefride's case,' said Bernard, smiling. 'And you then see, it's hardly likely that I should let you give me a great sum of money — for though from *my* point of view you're giving it to the Church, from *your* point of view you're giving it to *me*. I don't say the place would be worth as much as the rebuilding of the Abbey will cost you, but at least it will be a *quid pro quo*, and I could hand it over to you quite naturally as Winefride's dowry.'

'You young idiot,' said Michael, with a kind of rough tenderness. 'And what's to become of you?'

'Can't you guess?'

'I won't have it,' said Michael. 'You don't mean you *want* to ——'

'I've wished to be a religious all my life,' said the boy.

'You mean a monk? Or a secular priest like your uncle?'

'A monk. I hoped perhaps I might some day be a monk in the Abbey here — if the Cistercians came back,' said Bernard, hardly above his breath.

'Saint Bernard!' said Michael, with a half laugh.

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He stared at the thin boyish face, with its delicate features, guileless china-blue eyes, and happy open smile.

'Does Winefride know?'

'When we were children Winefride and Thekla knew — it was part of our childish plans for rebuilding the Abbey. But as we grew older we have not spoken much of what seemed an impossibility, but I see now how wrong I was to suppose anything impossible,' he added in a low tone.

'Look here,' said Michael, 'it's no use my arguing with you. I can't see things from your point of view, so it's no use pretending I can; but wouldn't it rather be deserting your mother and your post as head of the family, and all that?'

'My mother would not oppose it. If I married she would in any case leave this place; she has always said so. She would probably go to London and settle down near the Oratory with Aunt Lucy. And if you really do become a Catholic and marry Winefride it would be so simple for you to take my place.' Bernard looked at him affectionately. 'It all plans itself out so easily that one feels it must be God's will.'

'And the baronetcy?'

'The name is much older than the baronetcy. It's that I care about,' said Bernard, flushing, 'and besides, with money and all the rest, would it be so difficult to win that for yourself? You would go into Parliament, I hope, and make yourself a power in the country. It's in you, and not in me. Only if you could manage somehow to tack our name on to your own, and perhaps let your eldest son be Bryn Gryffydd, like so many of his forbears — my old

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grandfather's name — of course I'm not making a condition, but I should like it awfully.'

Michael stretched out his hand, and the boy took it, and they exchanged a clasp which said much that could not be uttered in words.

CHAPTER VI

Mass was at eight o'clock and breakfast at nine. Before the clock struck ten Michael and Winefride were away together, walking over the hills to visit an old friend of hers, who lived in a curious isolated cottage, perched above a deep gully known locally as the Glyn.

Here he dwelt beside a waterfall that in winter became a rushing torrent and in summer dwindled to a singing stream, dropping and trickling down the rocky, fern-shaded waterway.

To reach this eyrie of a solitary they had to climb a steep mountain path, winding through primrose-studded copses and over rough slopes covered with straggling golden gorse, below the delicate swinging lacework of the weeping birch, and the ragged shade of Scotch firs, with the red light of the morning sun gleaming on their mighty mailed trunks.

The Glyn paid for its sheltered stillness and absolute seclusion by missing the view of the wide panorama that was spread before the Castle; yet the blue distance of hills could here and there be discerned through the motionless dark branches of the encircling forest trees, and its wild beauty was sufficient unto itself. In the heart of it was hidden

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the low white cot, perched on a sheltered ledge of rock, below the crest of the hill and beside the waterfall.

The owner, clad in a flannel shirt, old grey tweed trousers, a leather belt, and a soft broad-brimmed felt hat, stood in the opening of a porch, stone-tiled, like the roof of his abode.

He smiled grimly upon the invaders as they mounted the steep approach to the wicket gate. He was a tall, powerfully built man, between sixty and seventy years old, with a fine straight profile, rough curly white hair, and a square chin glistening with silver stubble.

The bare outline of his history, which was, in fact, all she knew, had been recounted by Winefride to Michael on the way.

'He is known as John Edyvean, but whether it is his real name or not I don't know. Sometimes I fancy it is not. Oh yes, he is a gentleman, and I think he must once have been used to — to fashionable life, London and so on,' said the country maiden. 'Little things he lets fall make me think so. In the valley they say he was an officer in the Guards. There was a poor soldier dying of consumption here some years ago, who saw him, and recognised him, and said he was Lord Somebody, but Mr. Edyvean went to see him, and after that he would never say anything more about him. Mr. Edyvean paid for him to go into a nursing home, so he spent his last days in comfort. Mr. Edyvean is very good, helping anyone in that way with money, I mean, but I don't think he can be rich. All we know for certain about him is that he lost his wife twenty years ago, for that he told us; and that he has lived here

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quite, quite alone ever since. He has known Thekla and Bernard and me all our lives, for when we were quite little children we used to wander here by ourselves to look for bilberries and sloes, or gather wild flowers. And there are sheets and sheets of snowdrops in the early spring.'

'He used to come and talk to us, and laugh at us because he said we all had hair like spun gold, and pretend that if we stood in the sun he could see through us, because we were so absurdly fair. He was very much amused when he found out we always called him the mad gentleman. The people about all think he is really mad. But he is not; he is only eccentric. It is Thekla who is his favourite, but I go to see him sometimes, and he said I might bring you to see him. I am afraid you will find him rather unkempt. He does not care about his appearance.'

'You are early, Miss Winefride.'

The tenant of the Glyn had a very sweet and prepossessing smile, and greeted his pretty visitor with evident pleasure.

'I did not expect you so early.'

He passed his hand over his unshaven chin with an apologetic expression.

'This young lady and her sister used to scold me when they were children for not shaving oftener,' he said, as he shook hands with Michael. 'It was agreed I was to shave on Saturday mornings if they would come and see me on Saturday afternoons.'

'But Michael is going away this afternoon,' said Winefride, 'so I had no choice of time. I wanted you to see him.'

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'Aye, you make no account of *his* feelings, dragging him up these rough paths to see an old hermit,' said Mr. Edyvean. 'However, I make no doubt he would follow you gladly enough wherever you were pleased to lead.'

He turned his light hazel eyes upon the young man and seemed to scrutinize him, so that Michael coloured as he laughed.

'To be sure I would follow her to the end of the world,' he said frankly, and Winefride moved slightly towards him as they exchanged an almost involuntary glance of mutual understanding and adoration.

Mr. Edyvean's expression softened as he surveyed the two standing before him in the April sunshine; the fair girl, and the tall young man with his dark merry face and handsome eyes.

'Miss Winefride does not make mistakes. The perfectly sincere people seldom do,' he quoth.

'I am glad you think me perfectly sincere,' said Winefride.

'Transparent as glass, and especially when you stand there in the sunshine,' he retorted, 'but *you* ——'

Michael met his eye without embarrassment; respectful, as became a young man towards one so much his elder, yet always with that faintly amused expression.

'Michael is sincere, too,' said Winefride, quickly.

But neither man paid attention to her words.

'The wholly sympathetic are never wholly sincere,' said Mr. Edyvean, dryly. 'They respond to every appeal, and like the chameleon reflect the colour of their surroundings.'

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Michael nodded.

'But I don't think it fair not to call them sincere. They reflect truly.'

'For the moment, while it lasts, it is true.'

Michael nodded again; this time rather sadly. Then he laughed.

Winefride looked from one interested face to the other.

She was very fond of Mr. Edyvean, and anxious that he should approve Michael, but his words did not to her mind convey approval.

'I wanted you to be friends,' she said, rather wistfully, and to her surprise they looked at each other instantly and smiled.

'We are even brothers, little one, though he is so young and I am so old,' said Mr. Edyvean, 'and we have just recognized each other. Come in, come in. Mr. Ferrys shall see the inside of my cabin.'

Michael, uncovering his curly brown hair and stooping his head, stepped inside the cottage and perceived that the partitions which had formerly divided the interior had all been swept away. The walls and high-pitched roof were neatly panelled with match-lining, and the solid rafters were encased in stained and varnished deal. Planks were stored across the rafters and upon the planks a variety of articles — including a gun-case, a coil of rope, an old portmanteau, and one or two tin despatch-boxes — were stowed away.

The rafters were pierced by iron hooks from which depended some flitches of bacon and bunches of dried herbs.

At the far end of the cabin a small raised platform, curtained off, formed the sleeping apartment

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of the occupant. A low window ran along the north wall, lighting the whole length of the solid carpenter's table beneath it. The deep walled porch faced the west end of the cottage, and a verandah, supported on rough posts of yew, shaded the south front.

There was but little furniture. A cooking stove, a couple of wooden arm-chairs with red cushions, a writing-table, a small square tea-table, and many books on shelves running round the room.

A little stream of water fell continually from the mouth of an iron pipe in the wall into a curious old stone trough, with an opening which carried the overflow into the garden. Above the mouth of the pipe were fixed some strong wooden shelves holding a few cooking utensils, pots and pans.

The scrupulous order which characterized the abode formed a contrast to the careless attire of its occupant.

'He did it all himself; took down the partitions, match-lined the walls, and made the north window and the shelves and even the chairs; look how carefully the legs are morticed in,' said Winefride, zealously doing the honours. 'None of the furniture is bought.'

'Would you have a hermit buy furniture,' said Mr. Edyvean with a grim smile. 'And one takes care to make those chairs solid upon which one intends to seat oneself. The making of the cushions was a more difficult matter than the making of the chairs.'

'He cured the feathers of his own poultry and sewed up the red cases of turkey twill with string to make cushions,' said Winefride, proudly. 'He wouldn't let anyone even sew for him.'

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Michael moved out on to the verandah, and stood looking across the gully and the waterfall to the rounded tops of the bare forest trees opposite, on which the morning sunshine lay calmly, illuminating brown trunks and still interlacing boughs, and brown gold carpet of dead leaves and grass, from which the wild daffodils lifted their pale yellow heads.

The shelf of the hill, whereon the cottage stood, bore neatly raked beds of brown earth, spread before the verandah, and showing rows of springing peas, within a narrow edging of early flowering bulbs. They were guarded by a rustic fence, wire-netted to keep out the rabbits.

A flight of stone steps, ending in a wooden gate with an aged gnarled dwarf yew on either side, descended on to a lower shelf of garden. Here the rough leaves of potatoes were pushing their way through the mould, breaking up earth-clods with their persistent sturdy growth.

Over the low rough walls fell purple and white masses of flowering stone-crop, and pale blue periwinkles ran along the coping to meet them. Beneath the snow of a wild cherry stood a row of beehives on a low stand. A pair of white goats browsed on the steep, jingling little bells on their collars as they moved over the grass. The building birds were busy, and the gladness of spring was to be felt in the mild delicious air and fragrant scent of violets.

'I feel as though I had been here before,' said Michael.

'It is an ideal spot, is it not, for a wanderer to pitch his final tent, and await the inevitable?' said Mr. Edyvean, watching him.

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'I feel — at this moment, of course,' said Michael, with a responsive smile — 'that such a life as this is, after all, the only life worth living. The natural life ——'

'But when you think of London or Paris?'

'Then I know that if I had half a dozen lives I would certainly spend one of them like this.'

'In order to be able to enjoy the more acutely the other five?'

Michael laughed.

'The contrast would be delightful. Delightful, too, to have the whole long day before one; to smoke, and think ——'

'You are too young to think. The young mistake dreaming for thought. Thought is empty until you have lived.'

'Then I would dream. But I dreamed better when I was younger.'

'Aye, you must be young to dream. But at my age you will dream no longer. And if you are wise, you will not think over-much. You will work, which alone keeps mind and body sound.'

'It must be difficult to find work enough to fill all your time.'

'Not if you bake your own bread, get your own meals, and wash your own clothes,' said Mr. Edyvean, dryly. 'Still, there are pleasanter occupations. Gardening, for instance, and carpentering, which is my especial hobby, as Miss Winefride has explained. These occupations leave a few intervals for wholesome rest; pauses when one may watch the sunrise on a summer morning, for instance, as a man who goes to bed with the birds may easily do; when one knows the world is sleeping

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while one sits at one's board in the open air, before the produce of one's field and garden; content, like the old philosopher you have become, with herbs and goat's milk and bread and honey. And at noon — the stillness, and the drone of the bees, and the breath of the flowers — which tempt you to step forth and stretch yourself, and take a deep breath, and enjoy the beauty — aye, the open air and scanty fare and hard work are the best cures for melancholy, ill-health and trouble.'

'But there are also the wet autumn nights and the dull winter days,' said Michael, smiling faintly, 'when you must look into grey mist or starless darkness, and hear that rushing sound of the waterfall in the silence. Would not one feel the loneliness of it all then?'

'I have two companions, Hope and Memory. The one I love best pays me rare visits; the other outstays her welcome every time.'

'We must not outstay ours, Michael,' said Winefride, but she laid a gentle hand on the old man's arm.

'You could not. Don't you think it a great treat for the old recluse to see two people so young and happy and good-looking?' he said, with a courteous intonation which seemed to apologize for a plain statement of fact. 'When is my little Thekla coming home?'

'In the summer.'

'Not till then?'

'Not till then.'

'They are not going to make a nun of her, I hope?'

Winefride laughed softly.

'Not yet, anyway. She will come and see you and tell you herself about her plans.'

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'She must not die before she has lived,' he said, earnestly. 'I am dead, but then I have lived. My little Thekla is a wayward, emotional gipsy, with a heart like a harp that vibrates to every passing wind. Not a tender saint like my pretty Winefride, though she is as fair to look upon. It would not do to shut her up.'

'I did not know there was any question of it. Is she not a little girl?' said Michael, surprised.

'She is a child,' said the old man.

'She does not like it spoken of,' said Winefride, colouring. 'I had no idea Mr. Edyvean knew anything about it.'

'I did not know,' he said serenely. 'I only feared that——' Then a sudden change came over his face, which expressed a dismay almost ludicrous.

'Good heavens, is it possible? My *bête noire*, and it is too late to escape. She is here.'

Winefride looked in alarm, and perceived a figure toiling and panting up the steep ascent.

'It is Mrs. Kelson of Cwmcoel,' she said, in accents of almost equal vexation. 'Who would have supposed *she* would come at this hour of the morning?'

'Is one ever safe from plague and pestilence?' said Mr. Edyvean, angrily. 'Were she not a woman, I would have taken her long since to the edge of the ravine and dropped her into the waterfall. Being a woman, and a neighbour, I am obliged to suffer her.'

'They live close by,' explained Winefride in a hurried whisper.

'Is that any excuse for trespassing on my freehold?' growled their host.

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Michael looked, with an interest that speedily evaporated, into the face of his traducer. He recognised the type. He had seen it often; not only in Cairo, but in every corner of the globe to which the tourists of Cook have penetrated. The well-meaning, self-satisfied, inconsequent bore, with nothing to say yet determined to say it, whether her listeners would or no; indeed, unable to conceive that they should not be ready and anxious to hear whatever she might please to remark. The ill-dressed figure, and the determined activity that set at naught the hampering unsuitability of a trained silk dress for mountain climbing; the youthful flowery hat and bright pinks and blues that emphasized the plainness of the middle-aged, shapeless face.

'I was just going to apologise for being so early, but I see I need not, since you have visitors already,' she said, grasping the reluctant hand held out to her. 'It is ages since I have seen you, Mr. Edyvean.

'It does not seem so long to me,' said Mr. Edyvean, with a bow that disarmed suspicion; though Mrs. Kelson was the last person in the world who would suspect that anyone was sorry to see her.

'And dear Winefride! I must have a kiss. Mr. Ferrys! Do you not remember we met in Cairo?'

Michael bowed, but the lady held out her hand.

'You remember — Sir Jasper Fanshawe — Mrs. Carseleigh — Cairo — and my husband's brother, Jack Kelson, had the pleasure of meeting you in Rome. He said you were so kind to him,' she poured forth voluble gratitude, 'asking him to the

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opera; he is so fond of music, and said you were such a wonderful musician yourself.'

The voice of flattery, which was so odious to Michael, and so familiar, somehow recalled to the minds of the others present that this tall young man, with the sunshiny smile in his brown eyes, was the owner of the millions left by Alexander Ferrys, the South African magnate.

'Oh yes, of course. I remember quite well,' said Michael in flat civil tones. 'I am very fond of music.'

'And isn't it wonderful? I'm sure it must seem so to you in particular,' said Mrs. Kelson, imagining that by her social tact she was putting this tongue-tied party at its ease, and skilfully covering the ungraciousness of the hermit. 'Isn't it wonderful that our friend here lives all the year round in this funny little place? I always tell him it is like a caravan, don't I, Mr. Edyvean?'

'You have made that observation more than once, if I remember rightly,' he replied, patiently.

'Now, don't you agree with me, Mr. Ferrys, that it's a man's duty to come out of his shell and mix with his fellow-creatures?' said Mrs. Kelson, brightly and apparently inspired to this simile by the sight of a brown hen which came pecking her way across the potato patch, followed by a little yellow fluffy brood of chickens. 'We are all ready to welcome him. Just think if he were taken ill suddenly in this lonely place. Even *we* are over a mile away. No one would hear. No one would know. Isn't it a horrible thought?'

'We need not dwell upon it,' said Mr. Edyvean, calmly. 'You are out early to-day.'

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'We are all out very early,' said Winefride, shyly. 'I suppose because the day is so beautiful.'

'No. I make no difference in my plans for the weather. It never affects me. I don't care whether it's fine or wet, said Mrs. Kelson. 'I am going to a committee meeting at Llangar, and I took it into my head that I would like a walk, so I left the carriage down below and climbed up. It is not so very much out of my way. I believe Mr. Edyvean has no callers except you and me, Winefride. Funny we should never have run across one another here before.'

'Mr. Edyvean invited me to come and bring Mr. Ferrys to see him,' said Winefride, colouring.

'Ah, ha! and no doubt you came in the morning because you have found out, like me, that he locks himself into his house and takes a siesta in the afternoon. Last time I came up here I found all the curtains drawn and the doors locked and I could not get any answer at all, though I knocked and called for over half an hour. Of course I thought you were away, but when I got down again into the village, I met the Rector, and he said you had told him you were busy all the morning and asleep all the afternoon, and that he had taken it as a hint not to call.'

'The Rector is a sensible man, and I look upon him as a friend,' said Mr. Edyvean, warmly.

'But *I* shan't take any of your hints,' said Mrs. Kelson, laughing heartily. 'I don't believe in allowing people to be so unsociable.'

Mr. Edyvean's silent despair in the face of this assurance touched Michael, and he asked Mrs. Kelson a trivial question concerning the direction of

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her house, which turned the flood of her eloquence upon himself, and led to almost passionate entreaties that he would visit it.

He lured her dexterously round the corner of the cottage, away from the doorway which was so jealously guarded by the person of its inhospitable owner, as to prevent all possibility of her entry. Winefride was left alone for a moment with her host.

'You *do* like him, don't you?' she asked, looking up with confident blue eyes.

Mr. Edyvean returned the look kindly. His serenity was restored the moment his enemy was out of sight.

'You know it already, little one, or you would not ask me.'

He locked the door of his abode and put the key into his pocket.

'She shall not enter my house. She destroys the atmosphere. I am conscious of her disturbing influence for hours, nay, days — after she has left. Pray heaven she may not step in by the window, of the verandah,' he said in alarmed tones. 'I had better close it.'

'I don't think Michael will let her. He is so very quick. I never knew anyone so quick at divining what people think and wish.'

'It is a woman's gift.'

'Some men have it, *you* for instance,' she said, colouring again. 'When we were children we used to believe you were really magic, and could look into our minds. But you were always kind and understanding, though you detected the least shade of pretence so quickly.'

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'My dear, I could never have found minds more free from pretence than yours or your brothers'.'

'And little Thekla's?'

'Thekla is different. I cannot see so clearly into Thekla's mind.'

'Yet you like her the best of us all,' she said, ingenuously.

'Mystery is attractive, but so also is transparency. Thekla is the youngest, and I like people to be very young.'

'Do you call Michael very young?'

'Not in the sense you mean. Not young as you are now. But in another sense he will always be young, even when you have grown old. Does it not seem a sin to look on your pretty fresh, rosy face, and bright golden hair, and talk of your growing old?'

'But I shall *always* be five years younger than Michael,' said Winefride, wonderingly.

Mr. Edyvean smiled, and did not answer.

Mrs. Kelson appeared, beaming beneath her wreathed hat of roses and forget-me-nots.

'Mr. Ferrys suggests that since our host will be anxious to get back to his carpentering, you and he, Winefride, should return with me to the road where I have left the carriage, and look at my gees,' she said, with an exultation proportionate to her respect for Michael's income. 'I might give you a lift part of the way back.'

'That would be very kind, for it is much warmer than it was when we started, and the road we came by over the hills is very rough. It would be nice to return by the valley,' said Winefride, with a triumphant glance at Mr. Edyvean.

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'I will escort you to the bottom of the hill,' he said, in tones of undisguised relief, 'and we will continue our little talk.'

But as the two ladies first descended the steps hewn out of the rock, to the path which was little better than a timber chute, leading to the road below — he found himself in Michael's company.

'You will come and see me again one day?' said the hermit, abruptly.

Michael met his eyes gravely.

'I think I shall.'

'Whenever you come you will be welcome.'

'I knew that Michael would talk Joseph over,' said Lady Gryffydd, looking tearfully from the letter she held in her hand to her sister's placid and cheerful countenance. 'He writes he is more hopeful of him than ever, and that he was frankness itself in admitting his past faults, though Mrs. Kelson's reports of the supper party and other incidents were greatly exaggerated. And Michael is to go to him after Easter, and to be at Bronville with him when he goes up to stay with dear Ambrose. They are all backing him up against me, you see, and I might just as well have stayed at home for all the good I have done.'

'But you have given me a great deal of pleasure, and made a break in my lonely life,' said Mrs. Loveden, rather reproachfully.

'I don't say the change has not done me good, dear Lucy, and I am sure it is a great happiness to be with you, and able to say what one thinks naturally and openly. One never can be oneself with young people. First of all one has to be very

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guarded because they are so terribly sharp, and find out a great deal more than you meant to tell them, the moment you open your mouth; and secondly they are not really the least interested in anything one has to say and are entirely taken up with themselves, even the best of them, and I am sure my children are as good as anyone's. Still, I won't deny it is a rest to come away from them now and again.'

As she spoke she opened another letter and uttered a short scream.

'Oh, Lucy Agnes! I had better have stayed at home after all, for here is Winefride writing to tell me that *he* has been there during my absence.'

'Who? Joseph?' said Mrs. Loveden, flurried.

'No, no, Michael Ferrys.. Without a word to you or me or anyone, dashing down there quite unexpectedly in one of those dreadful tin-kettle machines, dropping oil all over the place and frightening everyone out of his wits, I make no doubt. That is the worst of these millionaires, one has so little hold over them. Once he had a special train put on to get him back to London in time for a concert, if you will believe me!'

'You told me all about it at the time. I could scarcely credit my ears. It must be very demoralising for a young man to have so much money at his command,' said Mrs. Loveden.

'Could you have dreamt that Winefride would allow him to come when I was not there? You see how she must have changed. She would never have done such a thing before she knew him,' said Lady Gryffydd, distractedly.

'I suppose, as he's Bernard's friend — and after all it's Bernard's house —' said Mrs. Loveden,

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faltering, 'it would be difficult for dear Winefride to prevent his arrival, especially as you say his visit was unexpected.'

'Could they not have telegraphed to ask me what was to be done? I could have gone back at once. But no. Evidently they were only too glad to have him all to themselves. You see now what a dreadful responsibility it is for me, dearest,' sobbed Lady Gryffydd, 'to have children with such extraordinary independent natures. The fact is, as I told you before, they all take after old Sir Bryn Gryffydd. I wish you would come home with me, Lucy Agnes, for Easter, and support my authority. For I must and will tell Winefride that she cannot receive visits from young men when I am not in the house to chaperon her.'

'It will give me the greatest pleasure to come home with you for Easter, dearest,' said Mrs. Loveden, soothingly.

CHAPTER VII

MICHAEL sat with a pen in his hand, beside the open window of a small bedroom with painted, wood-panelled walls that had once been white. The plenishing of this apartment was of the barest and most primitive. Facing the windows stood an old black wooden four-post bedstead that was too short for him; under his feet was spread a small threadbare square of carpet over the worm-eaten polished floor; the pictures were religious prints. On the common painted washstand the hot-water can, which had just been brought in by the old serving-man in his shirt-sleeves, had lost one hinge off the lid, which

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consequently would not shut. A piece of yellow soap lay on a white saucer which served for a soap dish; the towels were scanty, rough and torn.

Below the window lay a little square of garden with a grey stone fountain in the middle, and a lawn cut into diamond and heart-shaped flower-beds, gay now with daffodils and tulips.

This garden-plot was bounded by a circular carriage drive, and sheltered by tall forest trees and thick hedges of lilac and laurel from the town which had crept up to its edge. Through the scroll-work of old iron gates, however, could be seen glimpses of the sharply-descending street, paved with cobble stones, and grey stone and blue-slated, oddly-shaped houses in perspective; the smoke of innumerable chimneys rose above the brown tree-tops, and beyond the smoke again in darkly purple distance rose the hills, heather-covered.

Michael stared at this prospect, which was a grey prospect enough, and not illumined by any touch of sunshine, though it was midday; and then his eyes returned to the sheet of note-paper before him, which was at present innocent of any kind of superscription save that of the printed heading —

Bronville Hall,
Clode.

The clock struck, and he started.

'How long have I been sitting here? And I thought I had so much to say to her. Why do I find it so difficult to say it? It is the atmosphere of this house, its narrowness, its dulness, its emptiness, which depress me. There is no room for fancy, nor for the peace and joyousness of Aberfraw here.

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'Or is it only that I am getting bored of the whole thing?' His reflections were tinged with a shade of dismay even while he laughed. 'I suppose that is really the truth of it. *Unstable as water — thou shalt not excel.* But I'm afraid this sort of thing isn't much in my line. The days are uncommonly long ——'

He stretched himself, and then with sudden determination squared his elbows and dashed into his letter.

'Darling, darling little love of my heart — I'm trying to write to you from Bronville, and to tell you the truth I've been trying to for an hour, and it's difficult to begin, because you want a kind of history of my spiritual sensations and feelings and convictions, as the result of dear Uncle Joseph's earnest instructions, and I am not in the least inclined to write anything of the kind — not even sure whether I have any to write. At this moment my mind is nearly a blank.

'The gloom of Bronville is indescribable. Theoretically I am filled with admiration, for your grim and unbending Uncle Ambrose is a very remarkable man. His intense convictions, his stern determination to live up to the highest pressure of those convictions, his austerity, his abhorrence of luxury where his personal comfort is concerned, and sometimes I grieve to say even where the personal comfort of his guest is concerned — [*N.B.* — This is a joke, my Winefride; you always say you wish I would tell you when I am joking, so I make haste to label the remark] — all these things which I observe for myself, and others which I am told; how he opened this house as a hospital when the

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smallpox raged in Clode; how he sold his last family acres (save the little corner of park bounded by the river at the back of this house) to build a great (and hideously ugly) church for the hundreds of poor Irish who work in the factories up here; all, all these things fill me with awe and respect, but they do not make me sing and leap for joy. Forgive me, for I'm afraid I'm relapsing into that tone of flippancy which frightens your mother so much — it signifies nothing, sweetheart, don't let it frighten you.

'Perhaps this mood of mine only means that I am wearied by long absence from you, for whom my soul longs, and that I secretly and sulkily resent your edict, or your mother's edict of banishment.

'I liked better being at Swynbridge, in the funny little Presbytery with Father Joseph and his dear, smiling, peaceful septuagenarian French *junior*, who takes snuff, and preaches in broken English, whereby the congregation are sometimes put to it not to laugh aloud at his odd remarks. Here, however, we have certainly more time for talk, and as the family seem to think it as well that I should be approved by your beloved Uncle Ambrose, why, *me voilà* striving to win that approval. But, sweetheart, much I misdoubt me of failure in this respect, for his piercing blue eyes see through my shallow habit of thought in the most disconcerting manner, and yesterday at dinner he said to me in a booming voice, "Are you never in earnest, young man?"

'His gloom does not seem to affect the simple gaiety of his Jesuit brother, however. Alas, for the tradition of Jesuitical wiliness! Did you ever

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know anyone quite so childlike as poor Father Joseph? Yesterday — these being his holidays — we went into Clode for a walk, and after a trudge across the moor, which restored my spirits and doubled his appetite, I persuaded him to come to a small conjuring entertainment, showily advertised and obviously so poorly patronised that I grieved with all my unregenerate heart over the lean and desperate-looking hungry creature who was craning piteously out of the box-office jutting into the street.

'It took me a long time to persuade my beloved preceptor that it was not a theatre, and I believe in the end he only consented to enter because he feared it would be unwise to deny my frivolous soul a certain modicum of amusement.

'His own enjoyment was pathetic.

'We sat in the two-shilling seats, and need I say that we had the whole front row to ourselves at this price? But he clapped for six, and his astonishment at the number of rabbits taken out of an ordinary hat was so audible that even the unsophisticated Clodians smiled.

'A poor old painted harridan, in a yellow wig, dressed in gauze and sham jewels, was bound and shut up in a box, discovered immediately afterwards to be empty, etc. As she walked on from the opposite wing, smiling and bowing, Father Joseph whispered to me: "That is a very beautiful woman. I hope she is as good as she is beautiful," and there were tears of admiration in his kind, dim blue eyes. . . . I don't think Uncle Ambrose much approved of my outbreak, but Father Joseph stuck to it stoutly that it was very enjoyable and harmless, and right

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that he should see some of the wonders of the world, as these conjuring tricks undoubtedly were. He added benevolently that I was young, and must have some relaxation, and that he dared say that even such a beautiful entertainment as this was not to be compared to the London and Paris operas and theatres I was accustomed to. He has never been inside a theatre in his life, which to my practical ignorance of that section of humanity which he represents seems astonishing. I often feel as though he were the boy and I the old man; but then I also feel that I am not worthy to black the square toes of his shabby leather shoes.

'All this I write because after all my instructions I am not much nearer to what you wish, beloved, not much nearer to what I wish myself, alas! I have listened dutifully to much reasoning, only to be sure that with me it must be rather a matter of feeling than of reason. Indeed, this much is doubtless admitted, since grace to believe is regarded as the gift of God; and why then should anyone be angry or scornful with those who have not received this gift? But you are not angry or scornful, only sorrowful, my darling, and I would I could turn that sorrow into joy. As it is, the dumb argument which moves me most surely is that supplied by the vision of my Winefride in her white gown, walking up and down on the terrace with poor old Bernard, who is talking hopefully of a future which to him would not be complete without his friend Michael, while your little fingers search stealthily for the old steel rosary in your pocket, and your dear lips move, praying — praying always — for me, unworthy; whether you are there, out in the sunshine, or the

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mist, or the wind; or in the chapel, in the grey of early morning; or the evening dark, with the little red lamp glowing; or as you lay your dear golden head on your pillow. Do you think I don't know how you pray for me, and can you guess how infinitely the knowledge touches and impresses and sways me, sweetheart, so that my heart is full of gratitude as well as love, and longing to fulfil your least as well as this, your greatest, desire? In truth half of me is melting as I write — and the other half looking on with a smile and a sneer, saying coldly, What sentimentality is this? You love your Winefride, but how will that make you believe what you don't believe ——?'

Michael stopped and stared at the words he had written with a kind of startled, yet half-amused despair.

'If I write that it will break her heart,' he said to himself, 'yet what can I write? How can there be pretence between her and me? I am trying, I am trying honestly and with all my might to see eye to eye with her. I see the effect of their religion on these good men; making a hard, miserly, sour, selfish curmudgeon like old Ambrose open-handed, charitable, self-denying, even humble so far as may be; and turning a weak, amiable, pleasure-loving simpleton like Father Joseph into something like a hero; giving him the guide and stand-by and backbone he requires. But then I never needed to be convinced of the beauty of holiness, nor of sincerity, nor of self-discipline. It jumps to the eye — if one possesses a shred of artistic instinct or perception. It is over the fences of dogma that I stumble. . . .'

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He returned to the letter.

. . . 'I can't get over the feeling that I am playing a part here. Heaven knows I mean to be sincere, but I find myself asking myself "*qu'allait il faire dans cette galère?*" after a long evening *à trois*, with Uncle Ambrose seated bolt upright in his carved chair in the study, and Uncle Joseph trying hard to keep awake in one corner, and I smoking, endless cigarettes in another. All in semi-gloom and with hardly an idea in common. It is appalling to think how shocked they would be if I spoke out my real thoughts and feelings, though of the most ordinary kind, of the average man. But then they are not average men, and there would appear to be a great gulf fixed between us; filled with the details upon which they set such solemn store, and which are to me so hopelessly unimportant. Yet each in his own way shows me true kindness, and Father Joseph told me quite simply, and as a matter of course, that he feared his brother was exhausting himself by praying so constantly for my conversion. Why should they care so much? But they care of course for your happiness, and thank Heaven they seem to have a kind of inkling that that depends on your marrying me. Write and tell me that it is so, my darling. I need all the encouragement you can give me, for I am bored here beyond description, beyond —' Again he paused, and then lifting the neatly-written sheets he laid them evenly together, and tore them into small pieces.

'Why should I sadden her? And it *will* sadden her to read all that rubbish,' he muttered, with a restless movement of impatience and pity.

The thought crossed his mind as once before, and

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took as little hold as before — that he must rather hide his real self, his real thoughts, from Winefride, than reveal his innermost soul to her as his natural impulse bade.

He said to himself that he loved her too much to hurt her. His sentiment and imagination were quick and tender. He could not help seeing Winefride as, in a vision, stealing down the drive at Aberfraw in the early morning sunshine to meet the postman and get his letter. He knew the very hawthorn where she waited, and the glimpse, between the rhododendrons and over flowering buttercups, of the purple tops of the distant Welsh mountains. Almost the scent of the may came to him as he dwelt upon the mental picture painted by that most faithful artist, Memory, of the fair-haired girl he loved, and her setting of spring blossom. And he thought of her opening his letter with a happy flush upon her sweet face — the flush of eager hope —and could not bear the vision of her blue eyes filling with slow-gathering tears as she read — tears of disappointment and bewilderment — and of her stealing back into the chapel to hide her face before the altar and plead for submission and patience. He said to himself that he could not bear it.

He took another sheet of paper.

'My darling, — Everyone here is goodness personified. I had the kindest welcome from your Uncle Ambrose, and after a few days here I go back to London with Father Joseph to make the acquaintance of the celebrated Father Petroc, whom you probably know and revere, but whom I blush to say I had never heard of. Dear old Father Joseph in

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his humility believes that by reason of his great theological learning and his wonderful knowledge of men (he was a diplomat before he became a priest) and his eloquence and piety and powers of persuasion, he is peculiarly well-fitted to cope with my ignorance. Don't expect a very long letter from me just now, beloved. I don't want to write of anything but my love for you, who are everything in the world to me. . . .'

He finished this letter easily enough, addressed and stamped it, and put it in his pocket.

Then he left his room, stooping as he passed through the low doorway, and under an arch which led from the narrow passage on to the wide oak stair.

He descended this cautiously, for it was slippery and uncarpeted; and in the comfortless hall looked about in vain for the letter-box, and decided to post the letter himself. He took his cap and stick, and walked out into the drive and through the narrow cobble-paved street of Clode.

At right angles to this street was a much broader road, and here a high-stepping chestnut mare in a smart buggy attracted Michael's attention before he heard himself hailed by the driver. With a great clattering of hoofs the chestnut was pulled up beside the kerbstone.

'Ferrys! What in thunder are you doing up here?'

'Been asking myself that question all the morning,' said Michael. 'How are you, Roath?'

He was surprised at his own gladness to see Tom Roath again, and measured the extent of his boredom by that gladness. Michael had met him some

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years ago in Cape Town, liked him, and persuaded his father to show kindness to the young stranger. He had not seen him since that meeting.

'Where are you staying?' Tom asked rather eagerly, and his open countenance showed disappointment plainly when Michael nodded backwards over his shoulder and replied laconically —

'I'm staying there.'

'At Bronville? It's a curious old house, isn't it? I've never been inside it myself, but I've heard of its secret chamber and sliding panels, and so forth. There's said to be a tunnel under the park to the river. But if there was, the mouth has been blocked up. I used to search for it as a boy from my boat.'

'Do you live here?'

'My people live on the other side of the river. You can see our house from your windows. There's an eternal feud between my poor old Daddy and old Squire de Bronville.'

'Why?'

'I expect it's my old man's fault,' said Tom, politely. 'He's got a frightful down on Roman Catholics for some unknown reason. My old dad's awful for getting his dander up about Papists — ill or well, he's always been the same. I say, are you staying any time? Won't you come over and see us?'

'I'll come to-morrow afternoon,' said Michael, rather thankfully, seeing his way to shorten a long Sunday.

'Come to lunch,' said Tom, 'and you'll see the lot of us. We're all at home, my sister Edith, and Frank and old Humphrey and me. The fact is, you see, my poor old dad's a bit dicky. He gets heart

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attacks, and had a pretty bad one the other day, so we were all sent for in a hurry. My sister Edith's helping to nurse him, and he's practically all right now for the time being. Still at his age ——' Tom shook his head.

'I'm sorry,' said Michael, with the sympathy that came naturally to his voice and eyes.

'Yes. Well, of course it's got to come, sooner or later,' said Roath, simply.

'Sure I shan't be in the way if I come?' suggested Michael.

'Lord, no! Do him good. He likes visitors, and we're all as dull as ditch-water. Come at half-past one, won't you?' He beamed all over his jovial rubicund face when Michael acquiesced, and after exchanging a few critical remarks about the mare, which was the property of Tom's elder brother, the two parted, and Michael posted his letter and walked back to the Hall. But the incident had made a break, and his spirits were restored.

He felt himself better able to face the gloom of the dining-room, where old Ambrose sat at the head of the table, and Father Joseph at the foot, and a very deaf butler waited, assisted by an obviously half-witted footman.

Michael had wondered why these servants were kept, until he discovered they were *protégés* of Father Joseph's, commended to the charity of his brother.

When he received this communication he asked if the cook were another *protégé*, and anticipated the answer, which explained the cooking in a word.

'For a long time we thought it was fits,' said Father Joseph, benevolently. 'Fortunately the poor fellow is rather afraid of Ambrose, who keeps him

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in better order than we did. And the butler and footman are so steady in that respect that it sets him an example.'

Somewhere about the middle of Father Joseph's large round beaming countenance could be traced with almost ludicrous exactness the cherub features of the little boy he had once been; the short nose, Cupid's bow mouth, and wondering eyes of limpid blue; and his likeness to Winefride half amused and half annoyed Michael.

Squire Ambrose was built on a larger scale, and his thin pointed features bore an exaggerated resemblance to those of his nephew Bernard.

Though the corners of his mouth drooped sourly, and though his brow wore the pucker of an irritable temper, something of the same innate guilelessness, the same enthusiasm of the dreamer, yet shone in his blue eyes, which were not faded like Joseph's, but bright and piercing beneath his snow-white brows.

The old gentleman made daily efforts to put off his habitual taciturnity, and to maintain a light conversation for the benefit of his guest, though his subconscious self was occupied all the while with the composition of the draft of a letter to be sent presently to his Bishop. It was the simple Joseph who had cautioned this brother not to talk theology at meals lest his young friend and pupil should grow weary of the topic.

Mr. de Bronville's slow methods of carving and helping the dishes set before him were therefore punctuated by a series of comments intended to be playful and friendly.

'Eh? Now then, what have we here? What have we here? Jonas?' he would begin as soon as

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Father Joseph had said grace, speaking very loudly for the benefit of the deaf butler. 'Mutton, eh? A leg of mutton, and a very good dish, too. Where'd ye get it? One of Burton's killing, eh? That's good. That's good. We used to kill our own mutton, Mr. Ferrys, but that was a long time ago, eh, Joe? One of our own fowls, I make no doubt. The coachman's? Same thing. Same thing. Raised on my own corn, I'll be bound. May I give you a slice of mutton, Mr. Ferrys? Or the wing of a fowl? Mutton? I hope you like it cut thick as I do, and from the knuckle end. No? Well, well, lucky we don't all like the same thing.'

It seemed to Michael presently that a leg of mutton would make an ideal subject for a lecturer; since it provided an almost inexhaustible topic for a monologue; for the gravy, the colour, the choice of a well-done or underdone portion, the date of hanging, and the size of it, the age of it, and the breed of it, and other particulars could be entered into at any length, besides affording endless opportunity for platitudes.

Michael's depression returned upon him long before a rhubarb tart, with heavy pastry, and cream not of the freshest, replaced the mutton; but a chance pause gave him an opportunity of mentioning his meeting with young Roath, which he did with diffidence, recalling the existence of the feud.

Squire Ambrose looked gloomy, and Father Joseph regretful.

'I only know the second son, Tom. He tells me his father has had a stroke — no, a heart attack, and he seemed to think seriously of it.'

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'He is reported to be breaking up,' said Squire Ambrose, briefly.

'You don't like him?' said Michael, with his frank smile.

'It is no question of personal feeling,' said Mr. de Bronville, with reserve. 'He is an enemy of the Church.'

'He opposed the building of this church, many years ago, though it was so much wanted, and though he knew the town was full of Irish Catholics,' cried Father Joseph, with his simple directness. 'That was very wrong of him. But the young men, the sons, had nothing to do with that, Ambrose. They were little children. They may be very good fellows.'

'Tom is a very good fellow,' said Michael.

Mr. de Bronville evidently chose not to pursue the topic. He was impatiently tapping the Stilton cheese before him with an old-fashioned silver scoop.

'Let me give you a little of this, Mr. Ferrys,' he said. 'A present from an old friend of mine. A ripe Stilton. Full ripe, perhaps, you will find it. He knows that I am particularly fond of a Stilton cheese, and sends me one from time to time. I suppose as a kind of return for the game I send him. This seems to me, however, to want freshening up with a little port wine. Brian! Port wine.'

Brian brought the decanter slowly, and Mr. de Bronville held a tablespoon over the hollow of the Stilton in a rather tremulous hand, and filled it slowly and poured it slowly into the cheese, continuing his slow discourse concerning the giver and the gift.

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'Here is a man whom I guess to be a saint in his own way,' thought Michael, 'a saint militant upon earth; whom his nearest relations declare to be so conscientious that they believe he has never deliberately done a thing he knew to be wrong in his life — who has given of his substance to the poor, and mortified his flesh, and sacrificed his wish to become a priest, because, in his simplicity, he believes his position here, as head of an old historic family, to be a very great one to which he has been called by God; who plays spiritual providence, and for that matter material providence too, to a host of needy people, and yet — if his small talk did not obviously bore himself, as much as it bores me, I should write him down a fool. In any case, whether he be a saint or not, it is unhappily certain that to an ordinary worldling like myself nothing could be more tiresome in detail than the trivial round of his daily life and conversation.'

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. Roath did not, as a rule, trouble himself to pay much attention to his sons' friends, but even the most unworldly persons are apt to be unconsciously interested in the possessor of enormous wealth; and he entertained, besides, a grateful memory of the South African magnate who had held out a helping hand to his son Tom; wherefore he exerted himself to walk out upon the lawn before the drawing-room windows, and point out to Michael the superiority of the view over any that could be obtained from Bronville Hall.

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Michael was more concerned than flattered by this effort of his host to do him honour, for the old man's obvious weakness and difficult breathing and ashen pallor betrayed the seriousness of his condition only too plainly, and he wished the invalid safely back in his chair before the window. Nor did the prospect appear to young Ferrys to be in any way remarkable save for the distant background of purple moor and hill, half-shrouded in a dull grey mist, but lending distinction to an almost featureless landscape of stunted wood, flat green fields, and a sluggish river rolling between low banks of mud.

He uttered what praises he felt possible, however, in a manner which was, as usual, so pleasing that the matter signified little; and he was interested to observe the Hall from a new point of view.

It stood on the opposite side of the river, crowning a steep incline on the outer edge of the thriving and smoke-wreathed town.

A grey and gloomy dwelling, box-shaped, and shrugged sullenly away, as it seemed, upon its bare isolated square of ground, with only the rough paddock that sloped down to the river left of all the acres that had formed its park.

It was completely overshadowed by the church, which stood about a hundred yards distant from it, in a shrubbery of evergreen, and towering in its ungainly proportions above the few forest trees in its vicinity.

'You would scarcely guess from the outside what an old house it is,' said Mr. Roath. 'Much older than this, though this is by no means new.'

He turned and surveyed the stately Georgian mansion with fond eyes, that presently grew

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clouded. A sigh reminded Michael that the speaker knew very well that his residence in his beloved home was fast drawing to a close.

'Here is Edith, come to scold me for over-exerting myself,' the old man said.

'I told you not to come out, sir,' said Tom, in a self-excusing tone of some alarm.

'Stuff and nonsense!' said Mr. Roath.

Tom's father was merely an old edition of Tom. The broad shoulders were bent, the honest gray eyes dim, the yellow hair turned to grey; but both father and son stood six-foot-two in their stockings, and were fine specimens of North Country Englishmen.

The girl who came quietly but swiftly across the lawn towards them was surprisingly unlike either.

She was of medium height, and her figure was slender and well-formed and exceedingly upright. The carriage of her small head was expressive of calm decision and self-reliance, though the fire of her very fine dark eyes suggested that the calm was rather an acquired than a natural characteristic.

Remarkable her face certainly was, if not beautiful. The neighbourhood had long ago decided that Edith Roath had not a feature in her face and that she sometimes looked actually plain.

Yet beauty lurked in the dimple of her sudden charming smile, in the colour that could so easily be called to the clear, pale-brown skin; in the vivid animation and changing expression of her oval face when she was interested or excited. She gave Tom's friend a quick look and a smile, as his name was shyly mumbled by her brother, but her attention was for her father, and Michael was amused to perceive how guiltily the two big men faced her.

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'Papa! What are you doing out here? Come indoors at once.'

'I was just coming, my dear. I only stepped out into the air for a moment,' said Mr. Roath, with none of the truculence he had displayed to Tom.

'Tom ought to have had more sense than to let you come out,' said Edith severely, and she drew her father's hand under her arm and led him slowly but resolutely back to his arm-chair in the drawing-room.

Michael thought her a charming tyrant, but he was obliged to own her reasonableness when he perceived the greyness of Mr. Roath's face, and the panting of his breath as he leant back in his chair.

Edith uttered no more reproaches; she brought a restorative and administered it quietly, and as a matter of course, dropping the medicine into a glass with her steady, slender hand, and measuring it with grave dark eyes intent.

Something at once sweet and resolute in her manner, coupled with a complete absence of self-consciousness, made her extraordinarily attractive, though the attraction was perhaps rather intellectual than physical, and Michael's sympathetic and susceptible disposition did not permit his passionate love for Winefride Gryffydd to blind him for a moment to the charm of Edith Roath.

He found himself hardly less interested presently in the observation of Mrs. Roath, who, like her daughter, possessed a personality which it was impossible to ignore. Mrs. Roath came downstairs just in time for luncheon, apologising for lateness.

She was curiously young to be the mother of Edith, who in many ways seemed far more mature;

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curiously fragile and tiny to be the mother of those stalwart sons, for Frank was just such another big florid Saxon giant as Tom, though with less of intelligence in his face, and Humphrey, who came in last, was the tallest of all the four Roath men present, dark-haired like Edith, and with something of her charm of manner and expression.

Mrs. Roath flitted among them like a tropical butterfly transported to the alien grey of the North. Smaller, slighter and prettier than her daughter, with a plaintive note in her sweet voice, and a melancholy beauty of dark eyes, and tender, tremulous mouth that was in no way Edith's, lacking also Edith's decision of manner and calm sense.

Bronville town said that Mrs. Roath should remember her years and dress in more matronly and conventional wise; but as Time seemed to have forgotten her, she wisely refused to recall herself to his notice, and followed the promptings of her own taste. Her subtle personality expressed itself in her clothes, though she had been unable to impress it upon the solid unchanging surroundings of a home planned and fitted and garnished in a day long past.

There was something Oriental in the colour she affected, that contrasted effectively with the dark hair and the little pale face that retained its youth so strangely.

As a child she had had an elfin countenance, and was called a little old woman; and now as the mother of grown-up children the delicate small features and great eyes were elfin still; and a twisted coloured scarf, the suspicion of a zouave, and a string of bizarre jewels, added to the Eastern suggestion.

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The little shadows of weariness that Life had cast had dimmed her brightness, but could not destroy her charm; there was that about her which roused the chivalry of men, young and old — not the sense of comradeship that Edith inspired, but the desire to protect and shield her, and do her bidding.

Michael divined a hint of tragedy about her, and felt resentful on her behalf, as though a woman so exquisitely graceful, so delicately pretty, ought not to be allowed to grow old. Almost instantly an understanding was established between them, and by the time he had taken his seat at the luncheon table he felt that he knew the whole family rather intimately.

He had supposed himself indifferent to creature comforts, but he was surprised to find how much satisfaction he took in the mere fact that the luncheon was well cooked and well served, with how much pleasure he ate, and with how much relief he found himself discussing the ordinary topics of the day, after his experiences of life in Bronville Hall.

Mr. Roath did not appear at luncheon, and Humphrey sat in the place which in all probability his father would never occupy more. He was seven-and-twenty years old, but looked much older. Michael gathered that he had just resigned his commission in the Grenadiers and that there was a question of his standing for Parliament. He observed that the eldest brother was far more polished in manner than Tom, who was rather of the rough, good-natured, outspoken order, or than Francis, who was inclined to cubbishness; and also that

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Humphrey was obviously and undoubtedly his mother's favourite son.

After luncheon Mrs. Roath remained with her husband, and the rest of the party set forth on the usual Sunday round of inspection of the stables and farm. Michael presently found himself walking round the kitchen garden by the side of Edith.

'I hope you haven't been too much bored,' she said, rather apologetically. 'It's our weekly pilgrimage, and Papa would be wretched if he thought we hadn't been. When we were children we used to vow we'd never do it when we grew up, and we had a pretty shrewd suspicion that our visitors hated it. But you see it was as much the fashion in his day as family prayers, and Sunday would have been no more complete without it than without our learning a collect and saying our Catechism after breakfast, or going twice to church, or having roast beef and Yorkshire pudding for our midday meal, and cold supper to let the servants go to church. His parents did all those things, and Papa is very conservative. We had an awful job to persuade him to give up reading Bible stories aloud to us on Sunday evenings after we had grown up. In fact without Mummy's help we never could have done it. But I daresay you went through something of the kind yourself?' with the confidence of a contemporary.

Michael shook his head.

'No, but it is a subject that interests me. Personally I was not taken to church at all as a little boy, nor told Bible stories, nor given roast beef on Sundays, nor taught any kind of catechism.'

'Do you mean you were not taught any religion?'

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asked Edith, looking at him with frank interest now apparent in her beautiful dark eyes for the first time. 'Then you were spared all the searchings and heartburnings we all have to go through as we begin to think for ourselves.'

'I certainly had no heartburnings or searchings. Until lately I never troubled myself on the subject at all.'

She glanced at him quickly and curiously.

'Then the question is troubling you now?'

'I don't think it would,' he confessed, simply, 'but for the fact that I am engaged to be married to a Roman Catholic, on condition that I become one myself.'

'That seems rather a hard condition,' said Miss Roath, sympathetically. 'Though at the same time if I could have been born a Roman Catholic it is what I would have chosen. It is so nice and final, leaving one nothing to decide for oneself. It would save so much trouble.'

'That is what I feel,' said Michael, smiling at her frankly. 'And it is a beautiful faith, full of consolation. But ——'

'You can't assimilate the details?'

'It is not that.' Michael hesitated. 'It is odd we should be talking on so intimate a subject ——' he said, half laughing.

'One does not measure the possibility of discussing intimate subjects altogether by time,' said Edith, with her peculiar calm directness. 'One might know many excellent people for half a century and not be able to begin to confide in them. We are mutually, I imagine, aware of a certain similarity of mind, which makes it perfectly natural and easy,

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even on our first meeting, to talk of what really interests us. However, do not let us waste time in explaining *why* we are talking. I am interested, and so are you, in the subject in hand; and you hesitated because you suddenly remembered that you were talking to a woman and not to a man.'

'Not altogether. One confides far more easily, as a rule, in a woman than in a man,' he said, laughing and colouring. 'I think I hesitated because I realised suddenly, if you will forgive me for saying so, that you are very young.'

'I am six-and-twenty,' she said serenely. 'I should not judge you to be very much older.'

'And I should not have thought you were — as old as I am. You certainly don't look it,' he said, rather surprised.

'Years have really very little to do with age,' remarked Miss Roath, in a dispassionate manner. 'Some people are old at twenty-six, and others rather childish at sixty-five. You must have noticed that.'

'I have always thought it rather futile to measure human beings as though they were clocks, he agreed, 'when they mature, decay and die, more or less irrespectively of the time they've existed.'

'A girl of my age is much older than she was in our grandmother's time, even though she is no longer considered an old maid when she is twenty-five. For this reason: modern girls read freely, and modern books discuss religion and other problems openly, so that an intelligent girl is, intellectually, in advance of her grandmother, who wasn't allowed to read much that didn't square with existing beliefs on any subject. My father's mother

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was like that, and it has been a never-ending surprise and grief to my father that his daughter wasn't.'

'Your father is a very religious man?'

'The most truly religious man I have ever known, and one of the best and kindest. I can't even imagine Papa's wishing to do anything he knew to be wrong,' said Edith, warmly, and Michael nodded sympathetically. 'He does not, however, think it wrong to be intolerant, or rather, he is quite unconscious of being so, which, of course, is telling you that he is not a clever man.'

'He may be naturally clever, but strange to modern ideas,' suggested Michael.

'Just so. He is astonishingly ignorant of modern thought — intolerance is the sign-manual of ignorance,' she answered, calmly. 'It exists, I suppose, in exact proportion to lack of comprehension. But I do not think my father naturally clever. He has a dull mind. Full of goodness, and conscientious to a degree, but not capable of original thought. Plenty of common sense — why do you smile?'

'At the impartiality of the manner in which you are dissecting your parent's character, and to a stranger,' he said, candidly.

'I do not feel you to be a stranger, and I know you are to be trusted.' But she coloured.

'I do not see how you know that.'

'Have you never heard of a quality peculiar to women called perception?' she retorted.

He apologised with a twinkle in his brown eyes.

'Do you suppose I should speak to you of my beloved father at all, in a critical spirit, if I thought you capable of imagining that it meant I did not love and honour him with all my heart?'

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'I am sure you are a good daughter,' he said, warmly.

'I would lay down my life for him — I suppose for either of them,' she said, with the sudden animation and earnestness that rendered her face so charming, 'but that does not mean that I do not look at them with critical as well as loving eyes, and I have a habit of analysing character ——'

'You have not lived in Clode all your life, I take it,' said Michael.

She smiled.

'My mother saw to that. I was a restless child, and she was determined that I should enjoy everything she was herself denied in her youth. She sympathised with my longing to go to school, and I was sent first to Paris and then to Germany; finally to Oxford ——'

'Then you came out?'

'Not quite in the ordinary way. I stayed pretty often with my uncle, Colonel Bertwald, who has a charming house in Eaton Place, and who, being a bachelor, was delighted to take me about with him. My father wouldn't leave home; indeed of late years he has been unable to do so; and my mother wouldn't leave him, so there was little question of London. But I saw enough — and tried enough — to convince me that the ordinary life of a "come-out" young lady would drive me mad.'

'So you came home?'

She shook her head and smiled.

'On the contrary, I went to the hospital.'

'Which hospital?'

She named one of the largest London hospitals, and Michael recollected that it was one of those

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to which his father had bequeathed a generous legacy.

'Did you not know I was a trained nurse?' she asked.

'I knew you were nursing your father ——'

'He has another nurse, a night-nurse,' she said, 'but when he became so very ill I came to help. I take private cases, but it is not always easy to nurse anyone so very near and dear. They are more difficult than strangers. But he is very good now. It has almost reconciled him to my profession.'

'I wonder he ever let you go.'

'I was of age,' said Edith, and her firm lips smiled slightly, 'but all the same I could not have done it if it had not been for Mummy. She brought him round. I do not know how.'

'Your mother — even my inferior male perception enables me to observe that *she* is as clever as she must once have been beautiful,' said Michael, with the bluntness of youth.

Edith looked offended.

'Beautiful can never have described her, but a pretty little thing she is and has always been, even bewitchingly pretty. And as for cleverness' — she paused — 'her mind is like a razor, keen, quick — it cuts other people's feelings as deeply as her own, if I may run a simile to death. Yet she is almost uneducated. Perhaps that fact makes her the more original. Our old Vicar, who is a great scholar, says so; but he is her champion, like every man who knows her.' Her face grew tender. 'You had better not get me on to the subject of my mother.'

'But I should like to, for she interests me exceedingly.'

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Edith surveyed him with an amused smile.

'She interests everyone. She has a most extraordinary power of fascination. Her charm masters even my father's disapproval.'

His look and manner of interest drew her further into the confidences towards which she was already inclined.

'Of course they are the least well-assorted couple in the world,' she said, 'so it is the more extraordinary that they should love each other so dearly. Papa never opens a book; he believes simply and faithfully everything his mother taught him as a little child; it never even occurs to him to doubt or to question. The problems of modern thought pass him by. He likes to read the Lessons in church, and though he is far too loyal to his old friend to question the Vicar's innovations openly, he shakes his head over them, never dreaming how far behind the times is the dear old man himself. He would like all to be as it was in his father's day. He regards everything new, and especially anything he does not understand, with suspicion. He calls poetry rubbish, and though he likes a tune he can follow, any approach to modern music revolts him. And he married my mother when she was eighteen and he was forty. Well — you can guess what she must have been like — a little restless spirit, living in books and dreams. I don't suppose they had a thought in common.'

'Do you think — they found that out at once?' said Michael.

'I don't suppose so. She was so young. She had four babies in four years — and then she lost her health, poor little thing!' The daughter's tone

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was motherly. 'She has been unable to take much active exercise for years, and is generally on the sofa — but if anything her mind, her spirit, has been the more active for that. And I think it made her even dearer to my father — he is so tender for her ——'

'I understand that.'

'He almost worships her; so do the boys. Not one of them is capable of looking at her impartially, as I do,' said Edith, rather mournfully.

'Are you sure you are impartial?' He looked at her with a laugh in his eyes.

'Perhaps I am not very sure,' she admitted, 'but at least I can see the spiritual and intellectual loneliness she has always endured. For, after all, my sympathy to which she clung was only the sympathy of a child. And then she sent me away. Now that I see what a sacrifice it must have been,' said Edith, simply, 'I am even more grateful than I was at the time when I was so eager to test my wings — to compete with my equals — to try school life.'

'What would you have become if you had stayed at home?'

'Discontented and aimless. I could not have been happy with the things that pleased the boys — my pony and dogs and gardening. I should have craved for something besides, and my father was jealous of my mother's time and attention. In his way he was exacting, and as I say, a child is not really a companion for a grown person, however quick of understanding. I craved equal companionship as much as she did, and she who understands everything understood. Now I have a number of

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mental interests, though naturally a nurse's life gives little time — but I was able not only to acquire a little of the knowledge I desired, and to sort my ideas ——'

'And the result ——?'

She smiled.

'I am talking a great deal too much.'

'Please go on. Let us take another turn.'

'Tom will grumble at me for monopolising you,' she said, shaking her head. '*You* were beginning to tell me why you were so much interested in the subject I inadvertently touched, when I interrupted you with ——'

'A character sketch of your mother,' he suggested, smiling.

'Exactly. I did not mean that I was not interested in what you were saying, but that I have a fatal habit of pursuing a train of thought, and a good listener is so rare,' she said, apologetically.

'I should be better able to continue *my* confidences if you would tell me the result of your mental adjustment,' he said, adroitly.

'You are afraid of shocking my orthodoxy?'

'Perhaps.'

'My friend,' said Edith, so gently and earnestly that the adjuration held nothing of priggishness, 'how much orthodoxy do you suppose is left to a girl who has read——?' She ran through a list of names more or less familiar to him.

'Your knowledge of German has opened up a wide field.'

'And yours?'

'I was educated at Heidelberg, but I told you that I am not a thinker. Also I am not acquainted

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at all with the works of half the writers you mention, and most superficially acquainted with the writings of the other half. Of course I know their trend vaguely.'

'I studied with all my might, and spent my spare time reading — until I entered the hospital,' said Edith. 'My opinions are now more or less fixed, I suppose,' with the calm certainty of youth. 'I am the better for having cleared my mind of all those cobwebs of superstition.'

Michael walked on in silence, with his eyes fixed on the ground.

'It revolts your sense of the fitness of things that I should talk so?' she said, with a touch of scorn.

He looked at her frankly. 'I cannot deny that it does.'

'Why should you wish me to believe what you do not believe yourself?'

'I am searching for the reason,' said Michael, candidly, 'and I can find no logical one save the fact that as I said just now you are a woman, and young, and I should like to look up to you as to a being more spiritually-minded than myself.'

'Then you *do* believe in the existence of a spiritual world?' And as he hesitated she said severely, 'If not, you are talking nonsense.'

He evaded the question with a counter one.

'Does your mother?'

'She has taken refuge in mysticism because reading has stolen her belief in dogma. To me her state of mind appears chaotic. She clings passionately to an unknown God; prays literally without ceasing. She is in fact, naturally, intensely religious. There is nothing material about her. Her body is

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just the frail sheath of a mind made of fire; her imagination is a burning one, and her heart tender for all created beings. She is so generous that she would give away everything she had in the world. Her eager, secret, strenuous, silent search for truth is the most pitiful thing I have ever seen.'

'Why secret?'

Edith exclaimed.

'You cannot suppose she would hurt my father?'

'Do you mean that he — supposes you both to be — orthodox?'

'Of course,' said Edith, calmly. 'It would have broken his heart if my mother had told him. He is quite happy and satisfied with all she does. That she should even occasionally feel strong enough to go to church with him is a great joy. He sees her continually reading her Thomas à Kempis and other such books, and no doubt supposes she reads the service to herself when she cannot go to church. He would not understand any extremes of piety.'

'She has lived all these years by his side, and her thoughts are absolutely unknown to him?'

'Absolutely. There must be a good many women like that, don't you think?' said Edith, 'and how many men afraid to say what they think lest they should trouble their womenkind?'

'When did she begin to speak of such subjects to you?'

'Never. I began. When I left college I was very unhappy, and I soon saw she had no real comfort to offer me. When I stayed with my uncle in London I met a good many well-known people — clever men — scientists — and so forth. I asked questions of any whom I knew sufficiently well,

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or whom I found sympathetic. When I had driven them into a corner not one of them could declare that he believed in a Divine Revelation. You understand ——' She paused. 'I am not stating that no scientists and no clever men could declare their belief, etc., etc.; but that those few, whom I happened to meet and question, would not. They hedged and they hesitated, for, like you, they hated to hear a young girl say she did not believe in what they were finally obliged to own they did not believe themselves.'

'Yet that they should hate that, is in itself almost an argument in its favour,' said Michael, dreamily.

'You appear to me to mistake sentiment for argument,' she said. 'I can only tell you that of my many girl-friends — it is true that most of them were older than I, and that they were also the most advanced in thought among us, or they would not have been my friends,' she added candidly — 'nearly all have come to the same conclusions as I have, though most of them keep their conclusions to themselves. Some of them are married, and faced with the problem of how to teach their children what they no longer believe. One of these said bitterly to me the other day: "I have heard it made a reproach to us that no woman ever yet invented a religion, but it would seem that men gave us our religions only to take them away. And what do they give us instead?"'

'Are there any Roman Catholics among your girl-friends?'

'Only one. A French girl. She was frankly agnostic, like her father and brother, and she told us that all her male relatives were the same. But

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she married, and her little boy died, and she wrote to me in one wail of anguish that she had gone back to the Church. She could not bear to believe that she would never see her child again, and she said there was a little angel, calling to her soul from Paradise.'

'Another argument.'

'Another emotion. Reasoning is not your strong point,' said Miss Roath, reprovingly.

'I wonder if reason has much to do with it. It seems to me to be more a question of instinct.'

'If you feel that, you have, as I say, more in common with my mother's mind than with mine. That is always her cry, "*I have an instinct. There is something. Why may we not call it God?*"'

'I believe that God reveals Himself in every individual soul,' quoted Michael.

'Who said that?'

'Tennyson.'

'It is strange you should quote that, for I have taken these two lines for my motto —

> For modes of Faith let graceless zealots fight;
> His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

'How are you going to make sure your life is in the right?'

'I made sure in my choice of a profession,' said Edith calmly. 'It struck me long ago that almost the only careers of which no one could dispute the absolute necessity were those of doctoring and nursing. The men and women who follow them must have the supreme satisfaction of knowing that no clashing of creeds, no scruples of conscience, can touch their choice of their life's work. Yet, when

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I come back here to my home —out of the atmosphere of the hospital— it is as though I had stepped into another world. The talk which is my daily shibboleth means less than nothing to any of them.'

Michael thought of the world in which his love lived — the quiet atmosphere of the old country-house, 'and the Catholic country-house at that' — he reflected, rather amusedly; and he told Edith that to him also it was as though he entered another world in going there.

'There are hundreds of such homes in our country,' she said, nodding, 'filled with gentle-mannered, intelligent, kind-hearted, busy people, who live very much as their fathers lived, and know nothing at all of the "movements" that the little world of literary and artistic London believes to be convulsing England — people who are amazed at the portraits of themselves presented in modern books by those who do not know them, nor their lives, nor their quiet ways of thought. All my people are of that kind, I think, except my uncle, who is busy trying to reform everything and everybody? Yours?'

'I have no people. All my relations — who were not at all of the class you describe and which I recognise, though I have only lately come to know it — are dead, except one old aunt, devoted to good works, who regards me in my wavering between Rome and Agnosticism as one standing between the devil and the deep sea.'

She smiled.

'I am not going to pity you. No one that ever I heard of prayed for more relations, so they cannot be universally regarded as blessings.'

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'I have never bewailed their absence. Yet my love for my father was greater than I realised until after his death.'

'One's father and mother and brothers are different.'

'May I ask ——?'

'Freely.'

'About deserting yours?' he said, abruptly.

'I told you they did not need me. Now that I can be of use in helping to nurse my father, I am here. You must see,' she said sadly and gravely, 'that his days are numbered.'

Michael murmured a sound of sympathy, but the words 'What will your mother do?' escaped his lips.

'She will go — for her wander-year,' said Edith; a melancholy smile irradiated her dark expressive eyes. 'You think it will be a belated adventure? It is true that she has been too long a prisoner here. She is not of those who are made to vegetate. But never was any woman less dependent on her daughter. We understand each other perfectly, and she would be as miserable in condemning me to idleness as I should be in being idle. You look disapproving.

'Why should you not marry?' he said, bluntly, and then coloured.

The colour was reflected in her clear brown cheeks, but she met his eyes in frank amusement.

'Do you contend that I should do more good in the world if I did?'

'I am not a utilitarian. I am thinking of your personal happiness, of the wonderful companion you would be for some fortunate man,' he said, apologetically.

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'People, in my limited experience, marry because they fall in love, and do not take the question of companionship into consideration at all; if one may judge by the ill-assorted couples one meets,' she remarked, impartially.

'That is true,' said Michael, in rather a meditative tone.

The clock over the table struck four, and he started in dismay.

'I promised to be back for Benediction. Poor Father Joseph will be so unhappy!'

'I will show you a short cut to the ferry. You can get back in a few minutes that way.' And as he hesitated, 'I will make it all right with the others,' she said, imperiously. 'You can't break your promise.'

Michael demurred, but when she suggested that he should come to tea on the morrow, and make his excuses in person, he hesitated no longer, and ran down the path she pointed out, to the river.

As he climbed the steep field on the other side to the grey church on the height, he remembered with a kind of amusement that he had thought to give himself a rest from spiritual exercises by a visit to Clode Park.

CHAPTER IX

WINEFRIDE sat on the terrace at Aberfraw, with her fair hair uncovered to the cool breeze of evening, that had followed the heat of a long June day.

She was pleasantly tired by an afternoon's gardening, the nailing up of fruit trees, clipping of shoots and watering of dry and thirsty plants.

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Below her on the grass slopes the haymakers were at work, and around her was spread a feast of scent and colour.

Roses and new-blown pinks filled the borders of the terrace, and a red honeysuckle flung itself over the ramparts and dropped its sweet tangled trails across the mighty blocks of stone.

Blush pæonies nodded their heavy heads above the low carved parapet whereon Winefride rested.

In one sun-warmed angle of the old castle walls, the heavy blue bunches of the wisteria were mingled with the golden rain of the laburnum; in another, the delicate white lilac bloomed on standard trees above a gay carpet of purple and cream-white pansies.

The western end of the terrace was sheltered by tall flowering acacias, throwing long shadows across the borders and turf of the garden plot. Winefride was re-reading for the twentieth time Michael's last letter.

The perfect tranquility and content of her fair little oval face was that of a child, so happily absorbed in its own interests as to be unconscious of itself.

Her absolute trust in Michael was founded partly upon her love for him, and partly upon her profound ignorance of mankind; yet it was entirely, though illogically, justified. She read of his visit to the Roaths, and was only glad that he had discovered an escape from the boredom that oppressed him at Bronville.

She laughed over his description of Father Joseph's vain endeavours to enjoy the vacation his considerate relatives had procured for him against his will, and without consulting his wishes.

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'The fact is,' wrote Michael, 'that the poor fellow is so accustomed to find every hour of his day filled with hard work, that he does not very well know what to do with himself on a so-called holiday, and he has confided to me that, in spite of his gratitude for the indulgence, he will be only too glad to get back to his post, since the thought of the arrears which will be accumulating in his absence presses heavily upon his spirit.

'Now, beloved, the great Father Petroc has been here, and you will be wondering what effect the eloquence of the learned man has had upon me. First, I must own that his personality was a surprise. I had not expected anyone so charming, so unaffected, so — I would almost say — gay! The church was crowded to hear him preach. He was never flowery, never dogmatic, never denunciatory. Only simple, earnest, charitable. One little sentence struck my fancy, but I daresay it will be as old as the hills to you. He remarked that there were two roads to God — the way of innocence and the way of repentance. The following rough verses represent the kind of picture which his words created in my mind.

The Preacher said, there were two roads to Heaven,
And as he spoke, the Listener dreamed a dream,
And in a vision saw those differing paths
Which through the Ages led to God's White Throne.

One vision thrilled the heart and charmed the sense;
A path that wound its way through flowering fields,
Bringing sweet memories of summer morns,
Of trembling mists of heat, and early dew,
Of grateful shade upon the waving grass
From forest trees; as over cool, grey stones,
The welcome plash of little rivulets
Made music for the pilgrims on the road;

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Since pilgrims yet they were who passed along
In that fair vision; travellers unfatigued,
White-clothed, and light of foot and light of heart;
Pure maid, fair boy and little laughing child,
And tender mother; stalwart man of deeds,
Poor peasant bowed with toil, and white-haired priest;
Just judge, true poet, noble-minded sage;
And grave majestic Angels, silently
Bearing those babes whose little helpless feet
Had never touched our Earth — along the Path
Of Innocence, by which these went to God.

But as the Listener dwelt in ecstasy
On this bright vision — on the other side
There opened out a path less fair to view,
Yet ever leading upward to the Goal,
Though by a way of sorrow ill to climb;
Of frowning steeps hard trod by bleeding feet,
Of pilgrims ever weeping as they went,
With heavy hearts and eyes of wild regret,
With broken hearts and downcast eyes of shame,
With peaceful hearts and eyes of timid hope.
There no bright Angels, bearing sinless souls,
Among the travellers climbed the rocky way;
But darker forms, who followed stealthily,
To whisper of the dulness of the quest,
And breathe reminders of an easier road
Thronged by a gay and careless multitude;
So here and there, one, faltering, turned his face,
And gave his trembling hand to those dark guides.
Yet up and ever onward climbed the crowd;
Strong sinner, bold to scheme and swift to act,
Arrested by the silent touch of God;
Sad woman, with the pearl of chastity
Dropped from her unbound hair; unreverenced age,
Driven by fear of swift advancing end;
Fair youth, awakened by the voice of love,
Or given to a mother's faithful prayers;
Grey tyrant, haunted by a late remorse,
And flying from it; wretched flatterer,
Sickened by his own falsehood, seeking truth;
Lover of money, who, for greed of gold
Lets honour go, and wakes to find at last,
That peace of mind has never yet been bought;
The pleasure-monger, worn with vain pursuit

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And chasing of the phantom, Happiness;
The sweet-faced nun, who sorrows for a sin
Long since by bitter weeping washed away;
So white a soul, that God and she alone
Can see so faint a stain; whilst humbled saint,
Among his erring brethren bows his head,
And by the road Repentance goes to God.

'I make no apology for offering these lines to you, my darling, to smile over as tenderly as you please. There is a young lady here to whom I should not care to exhibit them, however. She is very learned — took every sort of honour at Oxford, excelling anything her big brothers have been able to accomplish in that line. All this learning is at present hidden under the cap of a hospital nurse; but, as some of it is learning in Medicine, let us hope it will not be altogether wasted. She is rather a modern young woman, but there is something attractive about her, though I am not sure how you would get on with her; in short, I am speaking of Miss Edith Roath, whose acquaintance I made, as I told you, the other day, through her brother Tom whom I met long ago at the Cape. I am not sure whether I do not in some measure prefer her mother's company to that of Miss Edith, but it is (unfortunately) rather the father of the family who has taken a fancy to my society, which is supposed to cheer him; and as he is in a very critical condition of health, it is impossible to deny his whim. The poor old fellow catches hold of my hand, as I take my leave, and says, "When are you coming again? My boys don't make me laugh as you do. It's not so easy to make me laugh nowadays. They all pull long faces over me. As for Edith, she is as grave as a judge."

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'This he says, though he is as near bursting with pride in his pretty clever daughter, I suppose, as any old father ever was yet. To Miss Edith only can I talk of you, sweetheart, and she must have a very good notion of what you are like, for whenever I go over to Clode Park, and as soon as I am permitted to leave her father's side, she always begins at once, with a very charming smile that makes her almost beautiful, "Now let us talk about Winefride," and the sound of your name is as the bubbling of water in the desert to the ears of a thirsty man.

'Poor Mr. Roath is uneasy, I must tell you, about my prolonged sojourn at Bronville.

'"Have a care, my lad, have a care," he said to me one day, and his kind old dim eyes were quite sad and anxious. "I know something about these Papists, but you are young and unsuspicious. They will be getting hold of you — they will, indeed. Don't fancy yourself a match for them!"

'My dear, he is just as certain that he is right in his form of faith as you are; just as anxious to do good and avoid evil; just as humble in the belief that he is on the eve of entering a Mighty Presence. . . The pity of it all is that he looks across at the old house, which shelters yet that secret chapel, where his forefathers (knowing no better, poor men!) probably worshipped in days that are past; and as he looks, his kind eyes are clouded, and his open honest face grows dark with deep distrust of the stern and rigid moralist who dwells therein. — How well I know that the mere expression of my sympathy with him will frighten and distress my Angel of the Single Mind! Let it not, darling; or, if you are sad, let it be all for the short-

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comings of the poor sinner standing without the gates, and seeing the beauty of all faith; and ever, as he considers the matter more deeply, becoming more and more conscious of the pathetic fact that all the world over, fretted by the consciousness of his own imperfections, man yearns with heart-rending anxiety towards the manifestations of a Greater than himself.

'But I am not trying to excite in your dear gentle heart any pity for Mr. Roath. Indeed, to my mind — but you know how far from certainty on any point is that which I venture to call my mind — this wreck of a sturdy farmer and gallant gentleman is in little need of your pity, or that of any other mortal. He takes his coming end in the spirit of poor King Charles the Second, although he does not in so many words apologise to his sons for not having died after all, when they were summoned in such haste to his side; Humphrey from Windsor; Tom from the three-legged stool which he ornaments so unwillingly in the City; and Frank from his military college.

'The poor fellows loaf around, anxious and affectionate, but with nothing to do, though we put in some pretty hard games of lawn tennis; six of us — for Miss Roath is among the players, and so is the curate, a splendid jolly boy fresh from Cambridge, who is falling in love with Edith, though he does not know it. Poor old Roath likes to see him about the place; in his day he, too, was a shining light at Cambridge; though never in the way of book-learning, I fear me. On the other hand, he is not pleased with the young man's theology, accuses him of a leaning towards Rome, and refuses to be called

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an Anglican or any other kind of Catholic, declaring that the Church of England, as his father knew it, is good enough for him. Young Franklyn takes it all very good-humouredly, defends his own opinions stoutly, confides to me the sad fact that old Roath is so out of date in his ideas that he can hardly believe he belongs to the present century, persuades the Vicar to bring his services more into line with those prevalent in the larger churches of the neighbourhood, and himself walks about in a cassock. He is doing no end of good in Clode, getting hold of the street-corner hooligans whom an older man could not touch, probably, and turning them into every variety of self-respecting, highly organised club and society for the promotion of games, etc., etc. They are a rough lot; but they appreciate the fact that he rowed twice in the Cambridge boat, and, perhaps for this reason, humour his fancies as they would not humour the fancies of the dear, gentle, old Vicar. . . .

'Father Petroc has had a long talk with me; or rather he has had a long talk, and I have had a long listen. Perceiving in a moment that my theological studies are boring me to distraction — a fact I have concealed without difficulty from both your beloved uncles — he proposes that they shall cease.

'"The dry bones of knowledge must be clothed with the flesh of conviction and vitalised by the spark of faith," he said, pouncing on a metaphor and detaining it, "or how can they live for you?"

'He then propounded his scheme, which was that I should leave Bronville, and go to a Benedictine monastery at Fort Aloysius, where his brother

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happens to be guest-master; and spend some time there in retreat, subject to a different course of religious instruction from that which dear Father Joseph is so anxiously bestowing. He says your uncle has really no spare time, and that it is a great strain upon him to have my eternal welfare pressing on his mind, in addition to his own work. Like the selfish devil I am, I have never given this aspect of the question a single thought.

'We will try and make it up to him later, won't we, my little fair saint? I wonder if you realise now that I was in dead earnest when I said I would go through fire and water for you? No knight of old ever won his lady so hardly as I, if I do win her at length, through these troublous seas of monastic argument, with which I am indeed utterly unfitted to cope. I cannot tell you how anxious I am to oblige them, and satisfy you, nor how my heart sinks when I realise how far from being able to do either I feel at present.

'But Father Petroc's sympathy and understanding have almost brought my fainting spirit to life again! The childish faith of Father Joseph — the stern dogma of Squire Ambrose — I can only behold from afar off; but the simple conviction of a thoughtful, sensible, clear-headed man like Father Petroc affects me differently. I will go to prison in Fort Aloysius, as I would do anything for your dear sake; and besides, the idea begins to attract me. But I must come down first and see you, my Winefride — this encouragement you owe me, and indeed I cannot live much longer without seeing you and that is a fact. So don't be angry with me if I come on Wednesday, and make it right with your mother.

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I will write to Bernard. Also I will sign myself to you in the pretty old way approved of our forefathers,

'Your most humble and obedient lover
'and servant,
'MICHAEL FERRYS.'

Winefride kissed the signature with all the furtive tenderness of a maiden deeply in love; and with something more — the serenity of one who is absolutely and entirely free from care or doubt.

She never argued with Michael, but she remained calmly and happily convinced that this beloved soul was drawing daily nearer to the threshold of the sanctuary, where she was waiting with outstretched arms to receive and welcome him.

But though her little, fond, and not over-correctly spelt letters to Michael contained no arguments, partly because she was wise enough to leave these to the experts, and also partly doubtless because her feminine instinct advised her — if he must be bored let it not be by her — yet Winefride spent many hours writing letters that were not to Michael — carefully written, anxiously thought-out letters to almost unknown relatives; to aged nuns and ecclesiastics; a Trappist monk in Spain; the Superior of a great Convent in the United States; a humble Sister of Charity in China; besides long, urgent, intimate scrawls to her sister at school, who in her turn set the ball rolling. Prayers were being offered for Michael by whole communities of whose very existence he was not aware; little *pensionnaires* in pigtails and blue serge uniforms were making novenas for him; a grey-haired solitary — whose

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name in the world had been Bernard Gryffydd, and whose almost forgotten personality had once been no less fiery and vivid than that of his elder brother, Sir Bryn Gryffydd of Aberfraw — was lifting octogenarian hands in supplication for this light-hearted young man's careless soul, offering up his own scanty, much-needed sleep, by stealing from his short time on earth a few precious moments for the sake of Michael's eternity.

Michael would have been touched, because he was imaginative and sympathetic, if he had heard these things; but he would also have said to himself that it bored him greatly to find himself the object of so much solicitude.

Of this latter fact, surprising as it was to her, Love, the great diviner, had made Winefride aware.

Wherefore she had said nothing to her lover, but continued diligently to implore the prayers of the faithful as secretly and unobtrusively as possible.

For Bernard's prayers she never asked. There was no need. They shared their happy vision of that 'faire Abbaye of Wales' sung by the old chronicler, which should presently rise again from the ashes of the past, in obedience to the wave of Michael's golden wand.

The brother and sister were, besides, each engrossed in dreams more intimate and sacred still. Bernard thought of his vocation, and Winefride no less purely — with the half-shy, half-solemn, and altogether natural happiness of a maid on the eve of her wedding — of that ideal being who she thought was Michael. Yet who shall say that Love does not reveal a man's soul more clearly to the woman

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who loves him than it is revealed either to himself or to the world about him?

Lady Gryffydd had not ceased to lament her daughter's engagement, but since she dared not express her regrets to Bernard or Winefride, and since Mrs. Loveden had returned to London immediately after Easter, she was reduced, with some qualms of conscience and an almost sub-conscious sense of her own imprudence, to pouring forth her lamentations to Mrs. Kelson of Cwmcoel from sheer inability to keep her anxiety to herself.

'I am sure you may be very thankful you have no children, but people without any never seem to realise what they are spared,' she said plaintively to her neighbour. They sat one on either side of a tea-table, whereon a big frosted home-baked cake was flanked by a small crusty home-baked loaf, and a silver dish of frozen yellow butter by a silver jug of rich yellow cream, while the pleasant fragrance of strawberries and roses filled the air of the great cool library. 'Children are all very well when they are little, but as they grow older one does not know how to take them.'

'I think I should have made companions of my children if I had had any,' said Mrs. Kelson, with the indulgent compassion of one who sees and regrets the mistakes made by the complaining parent, but is too kind to point them out. 'I should have wanted to share their thoughts and interests as they grew up, far more than to play with them when they were small.'

'It is all very well to prate of what *you* would have wanted,' said Lady Gryffydd, with the gentle exas-

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peration of an offended sheep. 'You would find that the only thing that counts is what *they* want. They haven't the slightest wish to share their thoughts with me. They mean well enough, poor darlings, but they look at things from their own point of view, not yours. They just say to themselves, "Poor Mamma, she doesn't understand —" though I went through all the things they are beginning to understand, before they were born or thought of. It is always the way. Of course there are exceptions. My Winefride used to be an exception before this young man came along. And I know *I* wasn't like that with my dear mother. But things were so different in those days — of course you are younger than I am.'

There was so little difference in age between the two ladies that Lady Gryffydd could not help thinking that Mrs. Kelson ought to protest instead of accepting the compliment as she did with cheerful alacrity.

'I have very dismal memories of *my* childhood,' she said, shaking her head. 'My parents understood me so little; in fact they misunderstood me so thoroughly that to this day I can't stay with them for more than a day or two without some unpleasantness arising. They have always got on my nerves, poor dear old things, with their antiquated prejudices. I am always telling them how out of date they are.'

'But that is what my children are always telling *me;* and what you may depend upon it yours would be always telling you, if you had any,' cried Lady Gryffydd resentfully.

Mrs. Kelson smiled soothingly.

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'I hope not. I hope I should make allowance for young things,' she said, with the glow of magnanimity which is induced by theoretical tolerance of unrealised trials. 'And really, dear Lady Gryffydd, I *do* think — we are such old friends that I may say so — that it is flying in the face of Providence to be so unhappy over this engagement as you seem to be. So many young men who have led careless lives settle down quite happily after marriage. As you know, they say a reformed rake generally makes the best husband. No doubt he knows what, and whom, he has to avoid.'

'Do you really think him a rake?' said Lady Gryffydd; her eyes grew round with terror like the eyes of a baby. 'I thought you said that the last time you saw your brother-in-law he told you the supper incident had been much exaggerated.'

Mrs. Kelson coloured.

'Surely we needn't go over that old ground again, my dear,' she said, hastily. 'I was not thinking of anything in particular; only of his general reputation, which you and I, talking together, need not pretend to ignore.'

'I'm sure I don't want to ignore it. I can think of nothing else,' said Lady Gryffydd fretfully.

'After all, he is not a mere boy. He has had time to sow all his wild oats,' said her comforter. 'We mustn't be too hard on him.'

'It's his father I blame,' said Lady Gryffydd. 'Why could he not have sent his only son to Oxford or Cambridge? Why must he send him off to Germany, where he was bound to learn to smoke pipes, and drink beer, and fight duels?'

'Has he fought a duel?' cried Mrs. Kelson, edg-

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ing her chair nearer to the tea-table with the keenest interest displayed on her florid face. 'I never heard of that.'

'Nor did I till quite lately. Bernard happened to mention it. He spoke of it as though it were something to be rather proud of than otherwise.'

'I wonder whom it was about,' said Mrs. Kelson, with sparkling eyes. 'Probably the pretty Italian woman he was always paying court to in Rome. It couldn't have been the wife of the man who robbed him — that couple who used to go about with him at Cairo and everywhere — or I *should* have heard of it. Besides I am sure *that* man would never fight anybody. Indeed, people used to say his wife beat *him*. She was a very big handsome woman with a terrific temper. And it couldn't have been Mrs. Carseleigh, for as far as I could make out her husband never minded *what* she did — I wonder if —'

'It wasn't about a woman at all,' observed Lady Gryffydd, reprovingly. 'It was about the Prussian Army. It appears that the Prussians seriously imagine that Blücher was the man who really won the Battle of Waterloo, whereas of course everyone knows that it was Wellington. But foreigners get excited and won't listen to reason, so that poor Mr. Ferrys has a scar that he will carry to the grave, and the young man he fought with was disfigured for life.'

'Very sad and shocking,' said Mrs. Kelson, in tones of extreme disappointment. 'Still — it might have been worse.'

'To be sure, he might have been disabled, or even killed,' agreed the innocent lady, 'but it was

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quite bad enough. I cannot bear to think of such savage ways.'

'He is not likely to have the opportunity again,' said Mrs. Kelson, consolingly. 'And anyway it is lucky that it was not Mr. Ferrys who was disfigured for life. On the contrary, I think him extremely good-looking, and as he is also extremely rich, I must say I think dear Winefride is a very, *very* fortunate girl. Of course I quite understand you would have liked him to be *un de nous autres*, but one cannot have *everything* one's own way in this world.'

After Mrs. Kelson had taken her leave, Lady Gryffydd could not help sighing.

'I don't know why it is, but I never feel the better for a talk with dear Mrs. Kelson. She has a depressing influence on me, and though she is really one of the kindest-hearted women in the world, I always find myself thinking less well of people than I did before talking them over with her.'

'Then depend upon it, Mother, she is not really kind-hearted at all,' said Bernard.

'Indeed she is,' said Lady Gryffydd, warmly. 'She is for ever doing kindnesses to the poor, and good in the neighbourhood.'

'She does a great deal of harm, too,' said Bernard, bluntly. 'She is a mischief-maker, always whispering confidences to other people's disadvantage. And she does not always speak the truth. Nobody who knows her trusts her, and I can't think why you like her, Mother.'

'I daresay I am foolish, but I *do* like her,' said poor Lady Gryffydd. 'And I don't think she means what she says. The words just slip out. It often

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happens to me, and then I would give the world to recall them. And I do believe she is fond of me in her heart. We have known each other for years. Though I don't know what she means by talking of "*un de nous autres.*" The Kelsons of Cwmcoel are all very well; but everyone knows that *she* is nobody in the world but the daughter of old David Davids. the solicitor at Llangar.'

CHAPTER X

On the last Sunday afternoon that Michael proposed to spend at Bronville, he attended Benediction in the chapel, before he went across to bid the Roaths good-bye.

He knew that tennis was not permitted at Clode Park on that day, for the master of the house followed his parents' tradition, and forbade the playing of games on Sunday; but he was nevertheless surprised to find all the family gathered together in the drawing-room, since the weather was particularly fine.

Tom and Frank took advantage of his arrival to slip through the French windows on to the sunny lawn and thence escape to the woods, but Humphrey lingered and spoke a word to Michael, before old Mr. Roath, who was seated in an armchair facing the open air and his favourite view, had perceived his visitor's entry.

'We don't think he's quite so well; he's been rather confused, thinking we were kids again, and asking us to sing hymns.'

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'I won't stay then,' said Michael. 'I only came to say good-bye.'

'Stay if you can. The Mater will be down in a minute, and you will cheer her up. Only, if he should talk nonsense, don't take any notice. He seems all right otherwise, but I've sent a note to the doctor all the same.'

Michael, in many ways more experienced than Humphrey, perceived in a moment a change in the appearance of Mr. Roath. His face was pallid, and his eyes wandered, though he spoke with his usual pleasant smile, and gave a languid hand to his visitor.

'Is it you, my boy? That's right. That's right. Glad to see you. We've been having a few of the old hymns, "*Abide with me,*" and so forth. The children have been singing. I wish they wouldn't stop. It gives me a deal of pleasure to hear them, poor things.'

'Would you like me to go on singing, Father?' Edith bent tenderly over him.

'Sing "*Abide with me,*"' said Mr. Roath.

She gave Michael rather an entreating look as though asking his indulgence; having, indeed, and in spite of their sudden intimacy, very little idea of the tenderness and sympathy which belonged to his facile nature.

She played the chords softly, and Michael was struck by the exceeding purity and sweetness of her low voice, and even more by the unusual clearness of her enunciation. As she ended the second verse he looked at Mr. Roath and perceived that he had already fallen asleep; his jaw had dropped, and a peculiar ashen colour overspread his face; his breathing was loud and difficult.

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'He looks as though death were coming very near,' thought Michael.

He made a sign to Edith, stepping softly to her side, and she rose and closed the piano.

'I am thankful he is asleep,' she murmured. 'He had such a terribly restless night. But he would dress and come in here as usual this afternoon. You know he sleeps on the ground floor now. Poor Mummy was up with him all night; he who used to be so considerate would not let her leave him for a moment. Heart patients are often like that; but oh, it is so unlike Papa!'

'It is only illness.'

'That is all, and he suffered so terribly. He couldn't breathe. Doesn't it seem strange that he should have to suffer — who has been so good to everyone — all his life —?'

Michael shrugged his shoulders.

Mr. Roath here woke, evidently refreshed even by so short a slumber, and spoke quite in his ordinary tone and manner.

'Have I been asleep?' he asked. 'Very rude of me. I dreamt you were all children again, Edith, standing round the piano singing hymns, with your mother playing. Where is she?'

'Resting, darling.'

'Don't let anyone disturb her,' he said, tenderly.

Edith arranged his cushions a little, looked at him rather uneasily, and came and sat beside him in a low chair, shaking her head entreatingly when Michael made a sign to suggest his own departure.

'I've been asking what had become of you, Ferrys,' said the invalid. 'I was afraid you had slipped off without wishing us good-bye.'

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'I've come to say good-bye now, sir,' said Michael.

'Eh, I'm sorry for that. We shall miss you. Where did you say you were off to?'

Michael had not said. He exchanged a glance with Edith and answered:

'To Scotland.'

'Rather early for Scotland. But you are certainly on the way —'

'I may go South first,' Michael said. 'I shall probably spend a few days in London. In any case I am leaving Bronville.'

'Well, you'll not forget us, and I hope, if ever you can manage it, you'll come and put in a few days with us,' said Mr. Roath, with a pathetic echo of his old heartiness. 'We don't forget your poor father's kindness to Tom, you know, though it's not our way to say very much. Don't go, don't go! You'll wait and see my wife, unless you're in a hurry.'

'I am not the least in a hurry,' said Michael, and he sat down.

Mr. Roath discoursed on the prospects of the hay, and Michael told him that he had heard from friends in Wales that their hay-making was over, and that the crop had been a heavy one; and Mr. Roath said that up in the North they wouldn't be thinking of cutting the grass yet awhile, and then again he seemed inclined to doze.

Neither of the watchers moved or spoke for fear of disturbing him, but Michael was acutely conscious of Edith's presence, the flush on her dark pure-complexioned face, and her grave hazel eyes, downcast. It seemed to him that his spirit was holding anxious converse with hers — sharing her fear for her father.

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'What a beautiful evening,' said Mr. Roath, waking suddenly.

The long shadows lay across the level lawn, and the rose-bushes lifted their burden of blossom against the dull purple of the misty hills. The cawing of the rooks, and the chimes of far-away bells softened by distance, broke the stillness of the closing day. All was peace, serenity and beauty.

There was a little space of silence. The invalid's eyes were fixed upon the landscape that he loved, and perhaps his thoughts were fixed upon it also, for he did not seem to hear the opening and shutting of the door.

Edith rose as the nurse came in, and gave her a look and smile, putting her finger to her lips. Then, as her eyes fell on her father's face, her expression changed.

'Call my mother,' she said, under her breath, with another look that said more than words.

Michael felt a momentary sensation of giddiness before he found himself helping to move a heavy cylinder of oxygen from a distant corner of the room. He was conscious, as though he were watching a picture in a dream, that Mr. Roath did not move, but lay quietly and peacefully back in his chair, with his dim eyes fixed upon the sunshine and shadows of the garden; that Edith was administering the oxygen, and that she murmured: 'It's no use,' and ordered him by a sign to hold the cylinder away, which he did, and heard himself whisper:

'How long?'

'A minute or two. He's quite unconscious now. Oh! if she would come!' The controlled agony of her voice went to his heart.

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She stood by the chair, with the nerveless wrist in her hand; the grief of the daughter almost, but never quite, overpowering the trained professional calm of the nurse.

Michael dared not move; he stood still, supporting the heavy cylinder, as Mrs. Roath came into the room with a kind of noiseless rush, followed by the nurse.

Edith's mother knelt beside her husband, and took his right hand, and it seemed to close over hers. There was not a sound.

Presently she looked up at her daughter, and Michael observed that the little elfin emotional face of the mother was calm, and that it was the composed and sensible Edith who was weeping silently.

'He is gone?'

'Yes, it's over. He didn't know anything about it,' Edith answered, in hushed sobbing accents.

'Please let me be left alone with him,' said her mother, in a steady voice.

The nurse helped Michael to place the cylinder in safety, and made a sign to him to come away. Edith came also and closed the door. She seemed to want to lean upon Michael, and he put his arm about her and led her into the empty dining-room.

She threw herself on to the sofa, and hiding her face from him cried so bitterly and unrestrainedly that he hesitated to leave her.

He stood beside her, infinitely moved, and full of tenderest pity.

'Would you like me to go?' he asked, as soon as she lifted her head.

'No, no, please — and yet — it must be so dreadful for you,' she sobbed. 'It's — it's the shock that

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has unnerved me so, and yet I've seen so many people die. But never — never one whom I loved. And I didn't think it would be so soon. Talking about the hay — full of interest in the life of the earth — and now — oh Papa, Papa — just gone out like the flame of a candle! The one we all rested on — so good, so upright, so dear. It's as though I'd never — never realised death before —'

Michael was silent. He knew not what to say.

There was something childish in her unreservedness; something altogether unlike the stately, decided, rather scornful maiden who was the Edith he knew.

At last he faltered.

'He suffered no pain — there was no sadness for *him* —'

'But there had been both,' Edith said, bursting into fresh grief. 'These last days — he has been looking back so sorrowfully to the time when we were all little and at home, as though he missed something in us now that we were grown up. It is true that we no longer confided in him as we used. But how could we help it? He wouldn't have understood. We were of our day, and he was clinging to the old ways of *his* parents. But we might have been more patient — it wouldn't have cost us much to humour his little fads —' She sat up and raised her weeping eyes. 'It's too late to talk like this. I despise myself. And yet — when I think that we shall never, never see him again — that nothing of him is left to us but his poor body — that all that dear upright nature and loving heart and noble spirit have vanished into nothingness — oh what is the meaning of life — what is the mean-

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ing of it all?' she sobbed, rocking herself to and fro, and then she cried suddenly:

'Oh, the boys! They don't know.'

'I think the nurse went to find them,' said Michael. There were footsteps in the hall, and the door opened quietly.

Tom's face left no doubt that he knew.

'Mother wants you now,' he said to Edith in subdued tones, and she rose and went out.

'I'm sorry this should have happened while you were here, old man,' said Tom; his florid face was very pale, and his voice shook. 'The nurse says — you were helping —'

'I did nothing. I'm only sorry for you all,' said Michael, in tones as low. 'I'll go off now, and get myself out of the way.'

They exchanged a silent handshake and he went.

In the morning a note was brought to him from Edith.

'DEAR MR. FERRYS, — I can't thank you for all you were yesterday, but you will understand.

'Will you come and see my mother before you go? Any time to-day. She is quite calm. She says she couldn't bear you to go without saying good-bye. Do you mind? It would be very kind of you to come. Yours sincerely,

'EDITH ROATH.'

He happened to put the little note down beside his daily letter from Winefride, and observed the curious contrast of the two handwritings. Winefride's large, unformed, almost childish hand, with

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the clear small exquisitely-formed characters that Edith wrote. That the comparison was unfavourable to Winefride made him think of her the more tenderly, and he lifted her letter to his lips.

He went downstairs and asked his host's leave to prolong his visit another day; and Mr. de Bronville intimated that if he chose to postpone his departure until after the funeral he was at liberty to do so. Michael, after a moment's hesitation, decided that this course would be in accord with his own feelings, and accepted. He knew instinctively that old Ambrose was incapable of understanding that anyone should grieve for the death of a friend of a few days' standing, and he respected him the more for uttering no word of comment upon the subject to him, though he guessed that the Squire would be less reticent with his brother.

This indeed was the fact, and Father Joseph's unuttered disappointment in his neophyte was not lessened by his elder brother's criticism.

'The lad's pleasantness of which you have spoken so often will be his undoing. A light, facile nature,' said Mr. de Bronville, grimly. 'All things to all men, I fear me, and I misdoubt the wisdom of Winefride's choice were he ten times a Catholic, and the more since he shows little sign of grace. I have no mind to judge him rashly, but I question my own wisdom in this matter. Yet I could not be found wanting in hospitality.'

'No, no. You did quite right, Ambrose. I am only sorry that I shall miss his company on my journey to London,' said Father Joseph, with his kind, simple face clouded over, 'and to be sure, I could wish he had not taken such a fancy to these

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people, though one must sympathise with them in their great trouble.'

'Old Roath's daughter is a handsome girl,' said Mr. de Bronville, sternly, 'and young Ferrys is about with her more than is seemly in the circumstances. I should like to see the young man less careless of appearances, though I do not question his loyalty, since I have no reason to doubt it.'

'He loves Winefride very sincerely, but we must remember that he is young and very attractive, I have no doubt, to ladies, what with his good looks and his great fortune. But Miss Roath knows of his engagement, for he told me casually that he had talked with her of Winefride, and hoped that Winefride might some day make her acquaintance.'

'Humph!' said the Squire.

CHAPTER XI

MICHAEL went quickly down the grass slope to the ferry, and landed in Clode Park, and climbed the path through the shrubbery to the house, which Edith had shown him on his first visit.

The day was as perfect as the preceding one had been, and the sun was so hot that the roses drooped; but the closed venetian blinds kept the house dark and cool. As he entered the hall he became immediately aware of the peculiarly hushed atmosphere.

Edith was hovering on the stair, and took him at once to her mother's sitting-room on the upper floor; but she did not speak, nor enter with him.

Her face was pale, and her eyes heavy as though she had not slept.

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Into Mrs. Roath's strange double boudoir the sunlight stole through the openwork portions of those carved wooden screens which hid and altered the shapes of the square windows.

There were carved openwork oriental arches, and partitions of the same wood; the walls were hung with silk and ornamented by a collection of spears and daggers of Turkish and Persian work.

The floor was of mosaic, and a little fountain fell with a cool plash into a square stone tank at the further end of the inner apartment, where ferns and palms were grouped in the dim light filtering through the richly carved openwork *grille* before the window.

There was a large divan in the corner of the outer room covered with rugs and down pillows; and beside it a low seat fashioned like a pile of cushions, though it was of solid upholstery and moved on castors.

Dwarf stands, also on castors, held respectively a heap of books and a beaten silver-tray, sunk into a frame, which stood at Mrs. Roath's elbow, bearing a golden goblet of red roses, a favourite volume with a paper-knife marking the last read page, and a mother-of-pearl cigarette ash-tray and match-stand.

Apparently reading formed Mrs. Roath's principal occupation, for there was no sign of any other in her own especial corner, where she received Michael; though he fancied he could discern a red lacquer cabinet that might serve also as a writing-table, in the inner room where the fountain played. Chiefly remarkable was the sense of space induced by the sparsity of plenishing.

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The open chimney, with a few logs piled on the hearth, lacked fender and fire-irons; and if there had ever been a mantel-shelf it had been removed.

Mrs. Roath looked more oriental than ever, and less than ever like the châtelaine of a substantial country-house, and the newly-made widow of a substantial North Country squire. But Michael's heart none the less went out to her in pity as he saw the great dark circles round her hazel eyes, and marked the pallor of her elfin, almost childish face.

She stretched her small chilled hand to him as he came and sat beside the divan on the odd, cushioned seat.

She saw his involuntary glance at the little gold-embroidered scarlet sleeveless jacket, that fitted her slender shoulders closely over the softly-tinted clinging silks and chiffons, that somehow reminded him of autumn at its gayest and saddest with the hint of moss and brown, and the gilding of the red zouave. With her usual quickness she cried out, in response to the glance:

'It's for the last time! I can never wear them any more while I live. He'd have liked to see me wear them up to the very last moment. It's — it's out of respect to him that I can't make any change until — until he's taken away from me altogether. Then everything will be changed, and why not me?'

She dropped her little dark head upon her fragile, almost transparent hands, and shook with an emotion which she would not shatter into tears.

It was characteristic of her that it did not occur to her to apologise for thus summoning Michael

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and causing him to postpone his journey, because it was her whim to want him; and Michael understood perfectly that she would have been amazed as well as hurt if he had not come.

'Oh, can't you help me?' she sobbed, with dry eyes. 'I am so very unhappy. I am in such despair.'

He leant forward and took one of the little hands very gently and respectfully.

'Alas, what can I do? I am very, very sorry. How can I help you? Tell me. I will do anything in the world I can. But who can comfort you? — unless, indeed, it is your daughter?'

'Edith! Who thinks his spirit has gone out, as she says, like the flame of a candle?'

She uttered a little melancholy laugh, that for a moment lit up her pale face and dark burning eyes, and gave her a sudden vivid resemblance to her daughter.

'Is that what *you* think, too? After all your search for Truth? Poor boy! It was because I knew that you were searching — like me — that I wanted you to come to me. The people who are satisfied and think they know everything in heaven and earth are no use to me. Neither the dear old Vicar who was his best friend, and who was kneeling and praying with him only the day before he — went away — and who mourns him to-day without a single doubt of meeting him hereafter; nor the young things like Edith, who have made up their minds about the next life before they have even begun to realise the fleetingness of this.'

'I have not lived much longer than she has,' said Michael.

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'But you have *lived*,' said Mrs. Roath, significantly.

'I wonder,' said Michael, sighing, 'if that was living?'

'I was a fool to think you could enter into my thoughts,' she said, flinging herself back on the cushions. 'You who are at the beginning of everything — who have been all over the world, and known change and freedom, and yet have your life before you. Young, good-looking, and in love. But look at me! What is there left for me?' She wrung her little hands in anguish. 'Once, God forgive me — I, too, wanted to be free — but what's the use of freedom now to me? I'm growing old. I'm growing old.'

'I think,' said Michael, sincerely and pitifully, 'that you are one of those who never grow old.'

She was pleased, and made no attempt to hide the fact, in the midst of her misery.

'While he lived, it is true that I should never have grown old,' she said, sadly and tenderly. 'He would have thought me always beautiful and always young, just as he thought me a miracle of cleverness because I was a little cleverer than he. But outsiders won't look at me with his eyes. Think what it is to be a woman who has been loved — who has been pretty — to find herself left alone to grow old and unlovely. To wait — just wait, for the end of all things. But it *can't* be the end of all things,' she sobbed, 'it's all too unfinished. Don't you see it's impossible? I sent for you because I thought you would agree with me that it's impossible. That there wouldn't be any meaning in our lives if they ended here. Everyone is always

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waiting, it seems to me, for something to happen that will explain the meaning and object of all we have to go through. Oh, mustn't that something be Death? He loved me, though the wall of flesh divided our spirits — his great simple loyal spirit, and my poor little restless burning one that often wanted to be free of everything and fly away. But, because we loved each other, we went on.

'Not understanding, never understanding; just living an innocent quiet monotonous life that was never, God forgive me, a very congenial life to me; but that I endured, because even in the midst of my secret discontent, something held me — invisible bonds. No, not my high principles — nothing of that kind; just the fear of hurting that noble and simple heart; thank God, I always recognised the nobility, even when the simplicity tired me. But I loved him all the while, though we had not an idea in common; and I wouldn't have hurt him or puzzled him or wounded him for the world. It was his soul I loved — that was like the innocent soul of a child, for all his wisdom and his stern principle. *He that shall offend one of these little ones.* But if that soul *isn't* — if he's nothing — nowhere — what would it have mattered after all? I have sacrificed all the days of my life — all my youth, my prettiness, my love of change, and beauty and emotion, and sunshine and gaiety — to these long grey days in the grey North — for a shadow — a dream — and waked to find myself old, and unloved and alone.'

Michael listened to her rapid nervous passionate utterance with something like an ache in his own heart.

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That anything so frail and weak should suffer with such fierce intensity of anguish seemed incredible. But his sympathy translated itself into conventional speech from sheer helplessness.

'You have your sons left —'

She was calm instantly.

'I am not talking of other lives, but of my own. Theirs are all to come. You don't understand. I was a fool to think you would. You are all egotists — you who are young.'

She folded her frail fingers together, and stared miserably into space, with great eyes fixed and her little sad mouth quivering.

'God forgive me for speaking of him at all. He would not have criticised *me* to a stranger had I been a thousand times more faulty than I am. Was he not, after all, the rock upon which I leant? Oh, if he could have taught me to be simple — to share his humble beliefs — to walk undoubting and contented in the narrow way. But it all meant nothing to me — nothing — nothing — and he was blind and did not see. To him I was an angel — sacred. He never guessed the thoughts that burned my soul as I pretended to read my books quietly beside him — any more than he knew the contents of those books — books which he never opened. Yet it was compassion that taught me self-control, and my secrecy was not all bad. I've spent my life beside him, dreaming, waiting, my empty life —'

'Your children would not call it so,' he said, pleadingly.

'They never filled it, though I loved them,' she said, quickly. 'Some women's lives are filled thus, but I am not of that kind. And, save Edith, they are

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more akin to him than to me. The better for them, if there is any good in anything. But to bring men and women into the world for no other purpose than to set them toiling along a wearisome road that ends in nothingness — what woman in her senses would care to do that? To create fresh capacity for suffering when there is no ground for hope that the suffering, nobly borne, is but the training of a spirit that will presently loose its bonds and soar triumphant! You'd think a man mad, wouldn't you, to start running a race whereof the goal was a bottomless pit into which he must fall and be engulfed in oblivion for ever? Would he bear the heat and the strain and the fatigue of such a course for the sake of the refreshment he might snatch by the way, with no better prize awaiting him? Yet — if Death ends all — that is the foolish quest for which a woman suffers torture to bring a man into the world. Don't you see it's impossible?' She waited. 'It can't be all futile — purposeless —'

Michael found himself dumbly echoing her desolate cry, but he looked into his own mind and found it empty of consolation to offer her.

'What can I say?' he asked, sadly. 'It's all mystery:

> Stars silent rest o'er us.
> Graves under us silent.'

'That is Carlyle's rendering of Goethe — the only real translation,' she said, eagerly. 'Yet do not forget that it was Goethe who also said

> Heard are the voices,
> Heard are the sages',
> The worlds' and the ages';

and

> We bid you to hope.'

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'Then hope, in God's name,' cried Michael. 'What should prevent you? There are people hoping all over the world. And — so far as I can see — what they are hoping for is just as likely to be true as anything else.'

'Aye, they are hoping,' she said, vehemently, 'for the assurance of the immortality of the soul — for the continuance of their own separate identity — for the certainty of meeting their beloved dead — for proof of the existence of a personal God. Does not my whole being cry out for faith in these things?'

'If that is so, I can't think why you do not take such craving as a kind of proof in itself,' said Michael, wearily. 'Were any such spiritual longing vouchsafed to me, I should not hesitate to gratify it. But you come to me for help, whose soul, if he have one, is possessed of no such instinct — no such craving — who is content with life as it is —'

She looked at him earnestly. 'Is that where your search for Truth has led you?'

'My present occupation deserves no such grandiloquent designation,' he said, with a faint smile. 'You are giving me credit for depths which I do not possess. I am learning certain things to please certain people. That is how I should describe most truly the task upon which I am engaged. Don't imagine that because I have a trick of sympathy — because I show easily what I feel easily — that I have deep emotions and the power of concentrated reflection, like you or your daughter. At least I judge you both thus. But I honestly believe that my mind is shallow. Of itself it would evade perplexing questions. I go lightly through life

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and do not regard the certain prospect of death and annihilation with any of the horror with which you seem to regard it.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'If they would believe it, I am not worth the trouble they are taking.'

'I wonder —' said Mrs. Roath, looking at him attentively. 'Yes, you have, as you say, a trick of sympathy. That is your charm, whereby you will attract women always. But there is much more. You are in reality generous and warm-hearted — yet perhaps you are right. There is not any great depth. Or is it only that it has never been stirred? You quoted Goethe to me just now. I will quote him to you:

> Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
> Who never spent the midnight hours
> Weeping and waiting for the morrow:
> He knows you not, ye Heavenly Powers.

Perhaps my tears are washing the dust from my eyes so that presently I shall see God. I felt last night as though Robert were calling me. Oh, if he could have come to me, even for a moment! Why are we left to grope in darkness —?'

She wept bitterly, and with an *abandon* that shook Michael's own self-control, possessing as he did that trick of sympathy.

'Let me call your daughter. She will comfort you better than I. She is suffering as you are,' he entreated.

'As I am! She is young and will recover presently. She will go back to the work she loves, and it will fill her days and her mind so that she will not have time to think,' said Mrs. Roath. 'Once I

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dreamed that my pretty child would grow up to make a happy marriage, and bring her children to show me when I was old. But now I should only mourn if I knew she loved a man. There are but a few happy marriages, and they must end in this — this futile agony for the one that is left. I would not go on living another moment if it were not —'

She paused and looked at his questioning eyes.

'If I were *sure* that there is nothing beyond,' she said, in a whisper that held something of terror. 'But I am not sure —'

He thought her almost distraught, and was amazed when the entry of her son Humphrey caused her to assume instantly her tone and manner of every day.

'I beg your pardon, Mother. I thought you were alone,' he said, with involuntary surprise.

'I sent for Mr. Ferrys to thank him for all he did — yesterday,' she said, simply. 'I thought it would comfort me a little to talk to him, and he is leaving the North so soon.'

'Mr. de Bronville will allow me to stay on with him until after —'

'That is very good of you,' she said instantly, and gave him her little feverish hand with the dignity of a reigning sovereign.

As he went towards the door she called him.

'We are going, later on, to London, Edith and I, to stay with my brother, Colonel Bertwald, in Eaton Place. You will come and see us there?'

'Whenever you will,' said Michael.

As he passed through the silent house, on his way to the garden door, he looked in vain down the

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long corridor and the empty hall for any sign of Edith.

She was not to be seen, and with a vague unwonted sense of disappointment and failure filling his mind and heart, he returned to his dreary quarters at Bronville.

Michael's journal for the week following Mr. Roath's funeral contained the following jottings:

Friday. — Staying Berkeley Hotel, Piccadilly. Saw the Batthyanys at dinner and several other acquaintances. Went to the Opera — *Meistersinger*. Thank Heaven, alone, and so able to enjoy. B.'s asked me to go to Ranelagh with them to-morrow. Accepted. . . .

Saturday. — Morning, looked in at Hill's. Ran in for a moment to see my dear little Aunt Milly. She could not conceal her joy when I was obliged to confess 'they' had not yet succeeded in convincing me. Offered to take her to theatre to-night. It appears she thinks theatres wrong. She corrected herself by saying 'Wrong for *her*.' Odd. That is what poor Father Joseph says. Poor little saint. She spends life in good works, and was just off to read to old people in the workhouse. Stopped at florist's and sent her a stack of roses and lilies, which no doubt she will carry with her. Meet of Four-in-Hand. Old Brendon's turn-out the best I saw. *Afternoon:* Ranelagh with B.'s. Got them to dine with me and to play. They brought nice-looking girl, Miss Van Hahnke; talked broken English. Pleasant evening, rotten piece; supper 'Savoy,' met lots of people.

Sunday. — Early down to Rosterleigh to stay. Largish party. Heaps of people down for afternoon. Heavenly day. Lady R. personally conducted me and a few others through the picture-gallery and to look at the tapestries, Queen Elizabeth's bedroom, etc. Took extremely pretty girl down to dinner, never got her name. Couldn't talk to her much because Mrs. Carseleigh sat on my other side. Rather a surprise to meet her. Told me she had met Lord R. in Cairo and he had insisted on her coming. Lady R. very stiff with her. Heard lots of Cairo gossip, on the whole bored. Bridge later, which made up for it.

Monday. — Gave Mrs. C. lift back to London in my new motor. Later met Batthyanys and Miss Van H. They lunched with me. Dined Bachelors with Mitchell and old Willy Gibbs, and went Weir's dance. Saw Mrs. C. home. Stupid evening.

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Tuesday. — Slept late. Stroll park, met Grand Duke J. He asked me to lunch. Went. Amusing as ever; he is *en garçon*, very hard up, etc. All as usual. Lunch came rather expensive, on the whole. Don't grudge it. *Afternoon:* motored to Ranelagh with Mrs. C. Motor broke down, and had to take hansom. Dined American Embassy. Lots of pretty women in pretty dresses. Everything beautifully done. Amusing evening.

Wednesday. — Ascot. Sent motor off to await my arrival at Aberfraw.

In Royal Enclosure found pretty girl I met at Rosterleigh was Lady Marjory Wulsin. Knew her brother in Canada. Talked to her a good deal. She introduced me to her mother; very gracious, asked me to call. Had rather bad day so far as racing was concerned.

Thursday. — Cup Day. Backed losers steadily. Taking Mrs. C. to opera to-night. Down to Wales to-morrow, thank Heaven!

CHAPTER XII

'GREY, but restful,' said Michael.

He was away with Bernard and Winefride to the Welsh hills.

Lady Gryffydd's insistence that there must always be a third in the motoring expeditions he made with his betrothed would have vexed him under other circumstances, but Bernard was of those self-forgetful and gentle few who efface themselves easily; always serene, always equable, and so unconscious of self-sacrifice that the egotists surrounding them remain also unconscious.

The pocket of his shooting-coat bulged with books; he carried his camera in his hand, and wandered off alone, after appointing a time for meeting at the little inn where the motor and the chauffeur were in waiting.

The lovers left the highway by which they had come, and climbed a steep hill until they reached a

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coign of vantage, where, from an isolated and hidden natural platform of moss-shrouded rock, they could at once survey the scenery and be themselves secure from observation.

Below them lay the slate-grey lake, fringed with pollarded willows and bounded by rocks over which splashed miniature foam-edged waves.

The green hills stretched away above and around them on every side, crossed and re-crossed by low, loosely built walls of grey stone.

Little Welsh sheep, so small and white, strayed over the short, fine, dry, sweet grass that belongs to the mountains; and little black cattle browsed at the base of the hills.

The emerald green was broken by wheat-fields of sodden yellowish hue, and the distant peaks, with grey clouds capping all, were mournful, misty, and sunless.

'*Un jour couvert*, but restful after the heat and glare and bustle of London in the height of the season,' Michael repeated; and he lay at Winefride's feet, with his elbows set in the moss and his chin resting upon his brown, slender, nervous hands. 'Not but what I enjoyed London well enough,' he added with a laugh that was slightly conscience-stricken, 'long as the days seemed that parted me from you, my beloved.'

'Mamma would not give way about your coming earlier,' said Winefride, apologetically, 'until Bernard really grew angry.'

'I could as soon imagine you angry as Bernard,' he said, smiling.

'Oh, but Bernard has the Gryffydd temper,' she said, rather proudly, 'only it is under control. Be-

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sides, it takes a good deal to rouse it. I have only once seen him angry in my life, and that was when he was a little boy and a cross nursery-maid slapped me. He flew at her like a tiger; she was frightened and we were all frightened. His eyes flashed, and Barney said he looked like old Sir Bryn.'

Michael laughed again.

For a little while they were content to be silent; enjoying the peace of the moment, and their surroundings, and the glad relief of solitude *à deux*.

Though the day was not bright, the pure air of the hills was at once fresh and mild.

Michael's beauty-loving nature found pleasure in the harmony of the landscape; the sunless calm of the solitary peaks, wreathed in floating mists, above them; and the green valley and grey lake below.

He had driven the brother and sister for many miles in his car through a beautiful country — past wooded hills, rich glens, ivy-covered ruins, and snug farms, into wilder regions of barren heights, frowning passes, towering rocks, sheer precipices, and rushing waterfalls — until they reached the shores of the still lake, set among the mountains, that was their destination.

They had lunched merrily at the inn, amused themselves for an idle half-hour by the water-side playing at ducks and drakes, under the exceptionally favourable circumstances of a beach composed almost entirely of flakes of slate, suited to skim the still surface of the water with lightning speed for almost incredible distances; and now Michael was minded to rest at Winefride's feet and feast his eyes upon her fair face — fairer even than his recollection had painted it, he thought.

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Yet she would have presented but an old-fashioned appearance among those acquaintances with whom his time had recently been passed in London; and realising this he smiled a little, but tenderly.

She wore a plain-fitting blue cotton gown, with Quaker-like collar of white lawn. A broad-brimmed straw hat shaded her fair hair and soft blue eyes and the short oval of her pretty flushed face.

The perfect healthfulness of that pure complexion, and those clear eyes, and fresh lips parted over small sound teeth, white and even, added something of the attraction of childhood to the loveliness of adolescence.

Michael's love increased to longing as he looked, and his longing grew to impatience at the invisible barriers which divided him from his chosen bride.

But it was Winefride who broke the spell of silence.

'Did the days seem long to you in London? They seemed terribly long to me here,' she said, with a little sigh; 'but then, there was so much less to distract one here, and you have so many friends in the great world.'

'People are pleasant enough,' said Michael. 'But it is you whom I want, Winefride. I need you more perhaps in London than here. It is when I am in what you call the world that I feel most of all that my guardian angel ought to be by my side, not far away from me.'

'Oh, Michael — perhaps, soon?' she said, imploringly.

'What are you going to do if after all I *can't?*' he said suddenly, and almost impatiently. 'Are you really going to cast me off into outer darkness and never see me again?'

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He felt a little remorseful, for the sweet content of the childish face was overcast by the distressful colour which flooded it, and tears filled the blue eyes.

He changed his position and took one of the slender hands and laid his lips upon it. Nevertheless he persisted.

'Are you going to cast me off in that case, and never see me again?'

'Never, never, so long as I live,' she cried. 'How could I live without the hope of seeing you sometimes? Even if we could no longer be — engaged,' she faltered, with a kind of entreaty in her voice, 'we could see each other still sometimes, surely?'

'Winefride, are you so simple as to think that *now* I could care to see you under such conditions?' he said rather angrily. 'That I could bear to be anything to you but your acknowledged lover or your husband?'

Her innocent eyes grew round with terror and pleading.

'But I could not think of you as anything else,' she said. 'How could I ever leave off loving you? I should always be thinking of you, and praying for you as I do now. I could always *hope* —'

'You don't understand,' he said more gently. 'Listen, my darling, I'm trying in all good faith to meet your wishes; but before I leave Fort Aloysius I shall make up my mind finally whether I can or whether I can't. If I'm not convinced after giving myself every chance of being convinced, I shall have to tell you so the next time I come here. And then *you* will have to decide whether you'll marry me or not. If you won't, I shall go away and live

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out the rest of my life as best I can without you, and there'll be an end of it.'

'No, there will never be an end. While you live — something might touch your heart and open you eyes,' she faltered — 'and surely — surely — such love as ours could never change, even if we were parted? Do you mean, that — that you — you could *forget* me — though you have said so often — that our love was for always —?' her lips trembled, though she strove for self-control.

'My darling, I ask no better than to love you for always,' he cried. 'But what will be the good of my loving you if you are not there? It is not only your prayers and your constancy that I want, but *you*, you yourself. Don't you see that if you make up your mind that you can't marry me, the sooner I leave off loving you the better it will be for my peace of mind? I am a mortal man — not an angel full of dreams. But what is the use of talking when you don't understand — anything,' he said, with a little shrug of half-humorous despair. 'There is only one thing that may appeal to you. If I come back and tell you that I can't believe all you want me to believe — and ask you to marry me just the same; and if you refuse and I go away — *what do you suppose is going to become of me?* I shall suffer of course, bitterly. I love you and I know you love me, and from my point of view it will be a dream, and the shadow of a dream that is keeping us apart. But, I warn you,' he said with impatient fire, 'that I am not of those *exaltés* who can spend their lives in the faithful contemplation of a distant ideal. I should suffer, and I hate suffering. I should seek every distraction and consolation I could find —

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sweetheart!' he cried, 'don't, don't turn white like that. Am I a brute? I don't want to be a brute. But what am I to say? How can I make you understand? God knows I love you — not only passionately as a man loves a woman, but dearly, dearly, more tenderly than you know —' he kissed the little hand again and reverently. 'I almost worship you — but that makes it so much the harder, the more impossible for me to do without you. If you throw me over, I shall slip back miserably but very certainly into my old life and my old ways. Did not your old friend the hermit recognise in me the chameleon, who took his colouring from his surroundings? But if you were my wife I believe I should reflect truly the truth and purity and constancy of your soul, which is as much stronger than mine as my body is stronger than yours. I don't know how to say it, sweetheart, but I *need* to anchor my soul to a soul steadfast, and loyal, and unshakeably upright.'

'How would it be unshakeably upright if I let myself listen to you and be persuaded to do what I know would be wrong, because I loved you?' she said, with a smothered sob.

'Is that your idea of love? To fail your true lover who needs you so, for the sake of your own salvation? To think only of yourself and turn from me because you think I am a lost soul?' he said bitterly.

The tears gathered in her eyes, and one was spilt on to the brown hand which held her own.

'Michael,' she said piteously, 'it is you who do not understand. I trust God. He will not let you lose your soul. He knows best. Perhaps it is not

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by marrying you that I could save you. And as for thinking of myself —' she broke down and cried pitifully and reproachfully. 'I have offered everything — my love for you — my hopes on earth — my life itself — not for our happiness in this world, but for this grace for you — the gift of Faith.'

'You would sacrifice me far more than yourself,' he said; but her distress was so grievous that he relented.

'Poor little thing! Always this dream of sacrifice. Why shouldn't you come to me and live and love and pray by my side? I would rather listen to your persuasions than to priests' arguments. If you trust God, why should you think He would separate us?'

'Oh, Michael, hush,' she said sadly. 'Your voice is mocking; it is not the Michael I love who speaks to me.' She put both her hands in his, and bowed her fair head upon them. 'Oh, Michael, listen to them, for my sake. Try and open your heart to belief. It is so hard for me to understand that it is all dark for you, when to me it is all so clear and bright and happy. But I suppose I should be *too* happy if it were not for this. I am often afraid that my love for you is — idolatry,' she said, with a look almost of terror. 'Perhaps it is because I love you too much that I shall not be allowed to marry you.'

'Nonsense!' he said, roughly, and came and sat beside her, and put his arms about her and strained her to his heart. 'Poor little dreamer, who loses herself in dreams!' he said compassionately; 'but I will not vex and trouble you like this, sweetheart, before even the necessity has arisen. God knows I am unworthy of your love as it is, without adding

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to my unworthiness by making you cry. Let us not waste the hours we have to spend together. They may be few enough. Dry your dear eyes, and look at these little papers I have brought out specially for you and me to look at all alone, away from Bernard.'

'Oh, Michael!' She was attracted like a child, and like a child forgot her tears.

'They were done by the very biggest and cleverest architect in London,' he said. 'The real ones are at his office, but I had the drawings of the finished building — as it will be — the interesting ones, copied in miniature for you; but they are all to scale, of course.'

And there were the images of Bernard's dream-monastery and its giant church, as they had once stood towering above the forest trees; monuments of grey stone dominating the green valley, re-created by a master hand.

She was full of exclamations and joy and delight; but suddenly she laid the little drawings down.

'If *it* is never to be,' she said, looking at him wistfully, 'this cannot be either.'

'On the contrary,' said Michael gaily. 'We must get it started at once in *case* it should not be. Then Bernard's scruples would come too late, and I should have the consciousness of a good work to uplift me in the midst of my despair.'

'Oh, Michael, how generous you are! How good! If only —'

'If only the impossible would happen,' he said, caressing the fair head that rested against his shoulder.

Her blue eyes looked away from him to the mists

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of the hills, and into them stole the dreaming ecstasy of one to whom the spiritual world is closer and more real than the things of every day.

'With God how can anything be impossible?' said Winefride.

They drove back through the wild and lovely country of North Wales to their own sheltered valley, under a stormy evening sky, grey and lowering.

Bernard sat beside the driver, and Michael beside his love under the hood of the motor, for the evening air was chill.

Her hand was clasped in his, and though they scarcely spoke, they had never felt nearer in spirit one to the other.

Michael realised more clearly that it was no longer only the loveliness and innocence of Winefride that attracted him, but also the strength that lay beneath that extreme gentleness: the force of character that she, no less than her brother and sister, had, as their mother complained, inherited from their fiery forbear, Bryn Gryffydd, as well as the strength of principle which made her faith no pretty symbolism, but the stern yet consoling guide of her young life.

He thought of other women whom he had loved, with that passing love that here and there offers itself to an idle man, and is accepted or rejected according to his circumstances, inclination, or character.

Michael's temperament was sympathetic and his nature, as he had declared, not of the self-sacrificing order; but throughout his sentimental adventures, which had been few in proportion to his opportunities, he had preserved his reverence for

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woman in the abstract; nor had he measured the possibilities of the many by the frailties of the few.

Among them had been more than one religiously inclined, who could nevertheless conveniently forget their faith when it pleased them to toy with sin, though they would infallibly rush back to it for comfort when remorseful or forsaken.

And turning to the other extreme — to principle without piety — he thought instantly of Edith Roath, of her calm strength of will, and high resolve to devote her life to the cause of right, without thought of present consolation or of future reward; then of the pathetic figure of Edith's mother — also a woman pure, and devoted, and filled with aspirations — and he realised that neither had attained that joyous certainty which gave to little Winefride her soft indomitable force. The restlessness of both was a predominant quality, although it was stronger and more compelling in the older woman.

The companionship of Edith had been delightful to Michael; looking back, he did not minimise her attractions nor the relief to himself of being able to speak openly of what was uppermost in his mind, without the limitations which he was obliged at every moment to impose upon himself in the company of Winefride. But he told himself now, as he clasped the dear little hand he loved, that he needed to idealise his wife rather than that she should give him the comradeship which he would find readily enough among his fellow men; and that if — the thought just glanced across the surface of his mind — if this country life which he proposed to share with her proved too narrow and monotonous after all, they could vary it as much as they

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chose by travelling, or by periods of residence in London or Paris — which would amuse him and open Winefride's mind. Everything was possible to the wand of wealth which he held.

It would be a bore to have to shake off some of his old associates, but he would do that for her sake. How carefully he would guide and guard her innocence, though, thank God! she had another and stronger guide in her own breast. Suddenly he realised that it was the element of discipline that was lacking in the characters of Edith and her mother.

They followed each the wavering light of individual reason and will. Mrs. Roath had, by the light of hers, acted a part for years and lived through a lifetime of self-sacrifice for the sake of the man she loved, only to find despair in her freedom. Would Edith's heroic devotion to suffering humanity end in the same tragedy of utter sadness and hopelessness, when the busy skilful hands would be obliged by weakness to lay down their hard, hard work; when the calm bright eyes would grow dim with age, and the firm lips falter?

He said to himself that it was evident that even the cleverest and most self-reliant women needed a religion.

Then his own reason mocked him.

How did their lives show beside his to whom he thus arrogantly assigned the greater need of a spiritual support?

He remembered the sturdy simple faith of the old man who had died in his presence, full of years and integrity. Old Roath had walked certainly in the fear of God from his youth upwards, faithfully

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abiding by the precepts his father and mother had taught, following their traditions loyally. Michael owned to himself that as this good man had justified his existence by lifelong perseverance in every recognised duty — as a citizen, husband and father, as a just magistrate, an industrious farmer, an open-handed helpful neighbour to rich and poor, who had truckled to no man, envied no man and been pure and upright in all his dealings — so had he anticipated his end with calm and resignation, never doubting of his reward, and lacking not consolation in the natural sorrow of parting from all he held dear on earth.

'If it is all a dream, it is a dream that produces strangely practical results,' he thought.

Then he fell to reflecting, with much distaste, upon his coming sojourn at Fort Aloysius.

'Michael, you are very silent,' whispered Winefride.

'I was thinking — of going to prison.'

'Do you hate going there so very much?' she said, in rather distressed tones.

'No, no. I shall get on all right. It's a bore,' he said, lightly; 'but I would do more than bore myself for your sake.'

She pressed his arm.

'Perhaps I shall fall in love with the monastic life, and become a fanatic, being as you know a chameleon; so that you will next hear of me as a holy monk — tonsure, cowl, and cord complete,' he said jestingly. 'How would you like that?'

'I should know God had chosen that way to answer my prayers.'

'Would you care no more than that?'

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He felt that her face was hidden against his arm.

'I would try to be only glad, but it would be very hard,' said the soft childish tones.

'I do not think it a probable happening,' he said, laughing rather grimly. 'I suppose you would turn nun?'

'No; Thekla is to be a nun. I should stay with Mamma. At least as long as she lived.'

'Your old friend the hermit did not like the idea of your little sister becoming a nun. By the by, how is the old fellow? I can't remember his name.'

'Mr. Edyvean. I saw him the other day, he was very well. He asked after you.'

'I'll go and see him,' said Michael suddenly. 'I should like to have a talk with him. He asked me to come again. And I tell you what, Winefride, I'll walk over alone, and you shall come in your little pony-cart and drive me back if you will.'

'He will be glad, for he must be very lonely, and he liked you,' said Winefride.

'How long will Mr. Ferrys be at Fort Aloysius?' said Lady Gryffydd, fretfully, to her son.

'I don't know, mother. I don't think he knows himself.'

'I think he must have a very hard heart, or else an obstinate disposition, to give everyone so much trouble,' said Lady Gryffydd resentfully. 'Why should he set up to be wiser than any of the great men who have believed?'

Bernard was silent.

'I think he has bewitched you all,' said Lady Gryffydd, shaking her head mournfully. 'Here is Father Murphy raving about him now as I never

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heard him rave about anyone in my life. And Mrs. Kelson pestering my life out to take him over to Cwmcoel, and the *Aberfraw Independent* writing to ask for an interview, and Doctor Jones half out of his mind because he's given him a thousand pounds towards his cottage hospital.'

'We don't get a millionaire down in these parts every day,' said Bernard, laughing. 'They were much worse in Rome. His door was besieged. I stayed with him in his rooms, and I know.'

'I hope good may come of it all,' said Lady Gryffydd, with a heavy sigh. 'But I don't like that laugh of his. It seems always hovering on the edge of his conversation; and I cannot think that any right-minded person, with his fate hanging in the balance, ought to be so light-hearted.'

CHAPTER XIII

'Now that you have done justice to my tea, such as it is, we will go out upon the veranda and talk, and smoke the pipe of peace,' said Mr. Edyvean. 'Or you shall smoke your cigarette and leave the pipe to me. I was for some reason sure you would come and see me again. But I was by no means sure you would come alone.'

After the morning's rain the afternoon had cleared; the purple clouds rolled themselves together and sank away behind the tops of the firs, leaving a clear sky and a sunshine that sparkled over wet leaves and glistened on wet rocks, and opened a thousand refreshed and grateful blossoms to its late warmth.

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Michael and his host occupied two home-made solid chairs beneath the rude penthouse which served as a veranda.

White foxgloves, self-sown on the edges of the little red path before them, were in full perfection of bloom, and the wreathed bowery that arched above the gate below was a mass of white and pink roses. From the interstices of the carefully piled dry wall of rough stone sprang red and ivory snap-dragon, and everywhere wet ferns thrust forth their cool spreading fans and uncurled pale, grey woolly fronds to the mild air. Spinning-jenny ran riot over the sloping sides of the steps which led from the garden-shelf to the wild gully below, and spread her web of tiny flower and leaf over gate-post and wall, losing it in the shelter of the honeysuckle's heavily scented draperies.

The torrent which raced down the glen, starting like a white thread from the heights, became a roaring, seething mass of yellow foam where the rocks below — shaded by dwarf yew and giant bracken, branching valerian and tangled brambles — endeavoured to check its headlong course to the distant river. On the further side of the gully rose forest trees in tiers from the carpet of brushwood — the copper beech beside its straight-stemmed, smooth-barked, green-clad brother; the sycamore's large leaves yellowing from the rain; mighty branching oaks, wild mountain ash, the pointed slender larch, and here and there among the emerald foliage the dark and sturdy yew.

There could scarcely be a more sheltered and altogether peaceful surrounding than the view afforded of this hidden cottage.

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'I came alone, with some vague notion of talking to you,' Michael said frankly; 'though why I should want to talk to you, or why I should imagine you would care to listen ——'

'Anyone so sensitive to first impressions as yourself,' said Mr. Edyvean, glancing at him quickly, 'is well aware when an attraction is mutual. I do not often let my own tongue wag, but I am mightily minded to let it wag now. *You* may get plenty of listeners, but the kind of listener who would be of use to *me* does not often mount this steep.'

'Winefride comes to see you?'

'One does not talk to a child,' said Mr. Edyvean grimly, 'however welcome may be her presence. But I forgot — no doubt you talk to her. You are young together.'

'Beside her I feel old enough,' said Michael, with a laugh.

'You are to be married — when?'

'I do not know ——'

He found himself struggling with words that would make his position clear to the older man, and, in doing so, realised the more fully the vagueness of his own thoughts.

'Their teaching passes me by,' he confessed; 'it may be that my mind is too shallow to hold it. I try to keep my thoughts fixed on the books they give me, but I can hear all the time my father's mocking voice; and find no answers to his arguments.'

'You cannot argue about religion,' said the recluse, cheerfully. 'Religion is an instinct.'

'It is not a universal instinct,' said Michael, 'since there are people born without it.'

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Mr. Edyvean regarded him serenely. 'Tell me of any instinct that some people are not born without. There are always abnormal people. Maternal love is one of the strongest instincts of humanity as of the animal world, yet there are mothers in both creations utterly devoid of it. But this fact does not make you doubt the reality of the maternal instinct. It is not less certain that there are materialists who are honestly unaware of any spiritual consciousness, than that there are people who have no ear for music, or to whom art means nothing. But you do not therefore deny the existence of art and music, which are, to many, as the breath of life. Why should you suppose that of all the instincts implanted in the breast of man, his instinct of belief in the supernatural should be the only illusory one?'

Michael looked at him with grave brown eyes, though their gravity was contradicted by that slight deprecating smile which for ever played about the corners of his handsome mouth.

'The instinct has existed in every quarter of the globe since there has been any recorded history of man — and wherein does man differ from the brutes save in his power to record the past?' asked Mr. Edyvean. 'The testimony of the Unbelievers runs through the Ages side by side with that of the Believers in form and creed; for the Thinkers within and without the established Religions of the world have borne steady witness to the necessity for an outward response to the workings of that inner monitor which we call the Soul — or the conscience — and upon these workings all the ethics of all time have been based.'

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'While the belief in the immortality of that soul has been evolved from the egotism of man, who cannot bear to contemplate his own extinction. At least, that is the commonest suggestion, and the most likely, isn't it?' said Michael.

'I would rather say that the belief has been developed by civilisation, together with our appreciation for what is noble and just and beautiful and clean, and our wholly acquired disgust for what is cruel and unclean and mean and ugly. It appears to me to have increased as naturally as the purity of our ideals has increased in comparison with the ideals of the uncivilised past. You do not doubt that the level at which the human race stands to-day is higher than that of the aboriginal tribes from which we sprang; why should you doubt that our minds are better able to grasp higher truths as our imaginations are inspired to present them? All great ideas have, admittedly, their foundation in the imagination; and the most inspired writers have been filled with this inward conviction of the existence of a spiritual world, and with a mystic, inexplicable certainty of a life after death.'

'There have been others, and those not the least learned, who have preached exactly the reverse,' Michael suggested.

'Aye, others who have only dust and ashes to offer their followers. Neither the hope, nor the consolation, nor the happiness, nor the peace that religion undoubtedly gives, and that human nature craves, *that it craves by instinct;* the one universal instinct — developing the more insistently as civilisation advances — that they would have you believe to be false and aimless.'

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'Some crave truth, beyond hope or happiness or consolation, and regard religion as a drug offered by quacks,' said Michael, slowly.

'And what would you think of the man in mortal agony who refused to take the drug which relieved him of pain, and which was known to have no harmful effect if properly applied — on the ground that the relief was merely illusory?' said Mr. Edyvean, grimly.

Michael smiled.

'It is strange,' said the hermit, 'that judging from your face, I should have said that none of the finer and more poetic instincts could be missing from your organisation. You are certainly not of the stuff whereof materialists are usually made; neither of the grosser class who are slaves to their bodies, nor of that rarer kind who, despising alike the claims of the flesh and the motions of the spirit, are guided solely by the working of the brain.'

'I am nothing,' said Michael. 'Perhaps a sentimentalist. My feelings are easily moved. My impressions do not last. Of this you were instinctively aware at our first meeting. When I kneel in the chapel at Aberfraw' — he spoke out his thoughts without apology or self-consciousness — 'even in the chill early morning, with none of the beauty of music, nor odour of incense, nor glamour of lights and flowers and singing of boys, to inspire my senses — and I see some of the gentlest and most innocent people I know — the simplest and kindest —bow their heads before what they regard as a great mystery — I, who see no mystery, being, as you say, impressionable, feel the awe and joy and wonder of their belief infect me. Something even

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of the consolation seems to touch me. I feel humble and sad at the remembrance of wasted hours, and hours more than wasted. I wish to — to be good as sincerely as though I were a child instead of a man. I envy their innocence, their peace of mind. I too long to pray.'

'And you would like to reason these feelings away because they are not founded on reason,' said Mr. Edyvean. 'But you can only reason about facts, not feelings. You might as well argue with a man who is in love. You may prove to him that the woman he does not love is prettier, cleverer, healthier, richer, younger, better bred, and better tempered than the woman he does; but his love is founded on his feeling and not upon his reason, and therefore it cannot be argued away. Yet it is real. For some, doubtless, only real for a short time; these are the shallow-hearted, or perhaps their souls may be but little things. Doubtless there is not more equality among souls than among bodies. The law of inequality is the unchanging law. But in others there lurks an element of the eternal in this love that they cannot explain.'

He ended in melancholy tones, and Michael's eyes questioned him, though he said no word.

'My story may mean anything or nothing to you,' said Mr. Edyvean. 'I am minded to tell it to you; for it is not reason, but feeling only, that impelled me to this life of isolation.'

Michael did not speak, and the hermit went on without looking at him.

'I suppose I had justified my existence, more or less, before I came here. I don't know. Perhaps if I had dreamed how many years lay before me still

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— but at fifty I was in bad health, in deep sorrow, without hope or interest in life. I had had twenty-five years' work, which seemed a lifetime then. But life drags on, and my working days have doubled themselves. Yes, I am over seventy, hale and hearty yet. I don't suppose anyone would give me so much.'

'I thought you hardly over sixty,' said Michael.

Mr. Edyvean smiled.

'The quiet, the hermit fare, the regular hours, may be responsible,' he said. 'Above all, the peace of mind.' He paused and then went on: 'I was happy enough as a youngster. My people weren't the kind to worry much about me personally after I had once gone to school. I had elder brothers. They grew up good fellows and good sportsmen, and I tried to imitate them. I was light-hearted and easy-tempered, like you, and I had every reason to be both, being young and healthy and popular enough in the Brigade, where I had as liberal an allowance as a younger son had any right to expect. I led the usual life of a lad in such circumstances. If anything I was more selfish and less moral than the average young man of my day, until I reached the age of four-and-twenty.'

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe and put it into his pocket, staring across at the trees on the further side of the gully, with something like a mist over those light hazel eyes.

'I fell in love, and according to my people, and my friends, and every acquaintance I had in the world, there was no reason for it, and every reason against it. The woman I loved had been married before, and was the victim of a man's cruelty and the world's

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censoriousness. I knew her to be an innocent victim, and one or two others knew it, but it would have been an impossible thing to prove to the world in general, and my people took the general view. My allowance was cut off, I exchanged into a line regiment and went to India with my wife. There's no need to go into details,' he said abruptly — 'it didn't do; and the climate didn't suit her, she was a very delicate woman. I came home and found work on a newspaper to which I had sent articles from India — I had always had a facility for scribbling and a liking for it. I went in heart and soul for journalism, and did honest work with all my might — and my early life and knowledge of the fashionable world, as well as my short Indian experience, were all to the good. For five-and-twenty years we were absolutely happy together ——'

His voice softened.

'This sounds to you as though I had sacrificed my career for love?'

Michael nodded.

'Well, I may tell you that I never had a regret. I was happier a thousand times with her than I could ever have been without her. I was happier working for my living and hers than when I was practically dependent upon my people. Bohemian society pleased me just as well in its way as the kind I'd lived in before — if it was less unaffected it was far more intelligent. When we could afford it, we travelled; had holidays in Italy, which we enjoyed as people who live in rooms in London all the year round do enjoy an outing. In a general way we cared for nothing but books and each other. We hadn't any children, and we didn't want any.

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It was a kind of absorbing partnership — everything in common — an understanding so complete that we lived a kind of inner life of our own, apart from everyone in the world. Yet in our youth we had both been rather gregariously and sympathetically inclined.'

He laughed.

'People are afraid to look back, they say, to the days of their youth; but I remember telling her on my fiftieth birthday that the last five years of my life had been the happiest. We had enjoyed also a small increase of prosperity, for on my father's death I inherited sufficient money to relieve me of any pressing anxieties. Still we worked, both of us, but in a more leisurely fashion. I limited my journalistic writing and started a book, and found leisure for that, and to read to her for hours while she sat over her painting. She had a trick of catching likenesses, and made a little money with her miniatures. She worked quickly as she did everything quickly, and copied out my illegible MS. in her delicate hand as fast as I could write it. We were partners even in that.'

He took a locket from his watch-chain, and held it out to Michael, who looked at it — and again only nodded. But his look expressed sympathy so well that words were not needed.

Something in the pictured face contained in the little gold trinket reminded him of Edith Roath and her mother, but with less of good looks than either. He had expected a melancholy beauty, but instead saw great dark eyes full of fire and intelligence, while a smile, gay yet delicately mocking, curled the corners of the rose-lipped mouth, as

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though the owner were laughing at the world which had maligned her — but which had been unable, after all, to rob her of happiness.

'Well, just before my fifty-first birthday she died. She had been ill for some time, hiding her pain from me,' said Mr. Edyvean, in a tone from which expression of any kind was carefully banished. 'Towards the end she could not hide it, but her terror was lest I should suffer from it — lest she should be disfigured, and I lose my last impression of her face that was always beautiful and kind to me. And for the first time we both knew jealousy: I, of Death which took her from me, and she, of Life which might hold something for me yet in which she could have no part. You see, she knew me,' said Mr. Edyvean; he looked at Michael with wide, dry eyes. 'As I knew *you* when I saw you — responsive, *insouciant*, not self-contained, but essentially of a nature craving sympathy; the chameleon taking its colour from its surroundings. I was perfectly, absolutely, happy with her; her influence over me was paramount; but when she should be no longer there —? I saw the trouble and the yearning, and the infinite sorrow in her eyes—the mute reproach which said to me — *If it were you who lay here, how well you know that my whole life would be consecrated to your memory, that I should live only to meet you again* . . . but she would never have put those thoughts into words She had a passionate and I a faint belief in another world. Like you, I was not by nature spiritually minded — but on the other hand I loved her so intensely that to have given her a moment's peace —' he caught his breath — 'without counting the cost, or indeed realising

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then that there could be any cost, I said to her, "There will never be anything else in my life; I shall be yours only till I die" — and swore it. She died the happier, God bless her!' He stopped and looked at Michael and said, 'I have kept my oath; and before she had been dead six months, and while I was yet sick with sorrow and misery and the loss of her, I knew that I could only keep it by coming away from the world in which we had lived and loved together, and in which we had many friends. I am not the sort of man who can afford to do things by halves. I am not naturally strong, nor faithful. . . .

'Now the reason I tell you these things which are to me sacred, is that from the time when I came here to live out the rest of my life alone, that secret inner reasonless conviction of the immortality of the soul, of which I had always been faintly conscious, grew daily and nightly until I attained to the calm security of faith in God.'

Michael recalled his conversation with Edith.

'Then you too believe that "God reveals Himself to each individual soul"?'

'Those words would have held no meaning for me once,' said Mr. Edyvean, 'but to-day, so far as I am concerned, they are true. Also I think that it is in solitude that the revelation is made most clearly now, as it was declared to be in the days of the early saints and sages. When the voice of man is silent the voice of God is very plainly heard. I am nearer in spirit now to the spirit of her whom I love, than in the days just after she died. I believe there are many, many, though they may never speak of such experiences lest they should be

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called fanciful, fearing also to reveal perceptions so intimate and sacred, who nevertheless have found that solitude and faithfulness hold this consolation, the solemn yet happy consciousness of the nearness of the spirits of their beloved dead. Not any visible presence, for how should pure spirit be visible to eyes of flesh? Perhaps to you, in your youth, with your life and happiness all before you, this may sound morbid; yet there is nothing morbid save when solitude and grief are attended by idleness or self-indulgence. I will defy anyone who lives cleanly and temperately, and who is disciplined by sufficient, not overpowering, bodily labour,' said Mr. Edyvean, looking round at the evidences of his handiwork with a little laugh, 'to lack a certain physical cheerfulness which is the finest of all medicines for the mind.'

'And for relaxation — recreation?'

Mr. Edyvean drew his pipe from his pocket, and pointed with it over his shoulder to the books which lined every available corner of his den. Then he produced a pouch of tobacco and filled that pipe once more.

'You said your character was weak,' said Michael; 'I think you have shown, on the contrary, an extraordinary strength of moral courage in braving this solitary existence, and persevering in it for so many years.'

'I can never make up my mind whether my action showed courage or cowardice,' said Mr. Edyvean, frankly. 'But I know the result has been that I have kept one great and perfect thing in my life, though almost all else I have done has been tinged either with failure, or disappointment, or regret, in

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the light of after years. But now there is one being in whose pure eyes I may look without fear or shame or self-reproach; who will not need to forgive; on whose joy in meeting there need be no cloud.'

He was silent for a long while, as though wrapt in the vision of that meeting; and Michael would not break the silence, but listened with quickened sympathy and with a wonder that the older man, awaking from his reverie, presently divined, and answered, gently and wistfully:

'How can you understand, who have not yet suffered? But you can do this. Ask yourself whether you are a better or a worse man for having knelt in that little chapel, and felt the desire to pray, and to listen for the voice of that unknown Force which dwells in your heart as in that of most men — unless your face belie you — and bids you love what is true and honest and clean, and be shamed for what is false and mean and impure in your own nature. It is true we all know that the Universe is full of mystery for us who are yet pent in our "prison-house of flesh," but why should we hesitate to hold fast that little secret clue we are each, more or less, conscious of possessing? that clue which becomes more clear and certain in proportion as we subdue the brute within us; and fainter, as we allow that to obtain the mastery.'

'I follow, sometimes, that inner guide of which you speak,' said Michael, slowly, 'and I am conscious also of uneasiness when I defy its promptings, and of course I have defied it lots of times. My life since I left school hasn't been a particularly edifying one. But I've never attached to that which

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you would call my conscience any superhuman meaning. It is to me merely memory recalling the code by which I have been brought up to understand a man of honour should endeavour to abide. Still, granting that it is as you say — the voice of the immortal soul within me, that voice utters no word to dispel the eternal mystery of which you speak. And here is my difficulty. I am asked to assent to the proposition that the mystery has been revealed and defined; to stand up and make a brave profession of knowledge of that whereof I have no knowledge; to say *I believe*, though this magnificent structure in which I am invited to assert my belief has been confessedly reared upon a Dream, and the record of a Dream.'

'"*It is only for the sake of the dreams that visit it, that the world of reality has any certain value for us*,"' quoted Mr. Edyvean. 'In other words, the actual experience of mankind proves that his dreams — *i.e.* his ideas, his thoughts, his words — survive the material portion of him. On my shelves you will find the Books of the great religions of the world. Through them all — and countless other compilations of the Thinkers and Recorders of the Ages — runs the same thought, the same conviction of the valuelessness of material things, and the immeasurable value of what is intangible; of the abstract qualities evolved from the inspired imagination of civilised man. And in all are embodied the vital necessity of Rule; of outward form, in order that obedience may ensure the triumph of the higher — the invisible and lasting — over the lower — the material and perishable.'

'I too would shut my eyes and obey. I would not

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cavil at discipline, since chaos must result if the rank and file were allowed to question the decision of their leaders. I would submit to any Rule, if — if I had that inward conviction of which you speak, which I know so many of my betters have — which I know many of the greatest thinkers have had,' said Michael. 'But how in the name of common honesty am I to profess it when I have it not?'

'It will come,' said Mr. Edyvean.

'I could wish,' said Michael, petulantly, 'that my thoughts had not been forced into this channel; that I had not been roused from my happy carelessness of fate, and obliged to spend hours in reading and thought, which has induced a melancholy foreign to my disposition and intensely irksome to it.'

'Aye, it is irksome to be made to think when one is young and full of the joy of life; impatient of all that is not enjoyment.'

'I am not so young as all that,' said Michael, with a laugh that betrayed vexation. 'I do not find life a whirl of pleasure; but I found it pleasant enough before I was forced to examine its conditions too closely.'

'There was a time when I felt like you, little brother,' said the old man, nodding curiously at him. 'How you echo my thoughts of long ago! Yet you seem to me now a being far removed, belonging to a world with which I have nothing to do. You will not always be young and full of health and the joy of living. When sorrow comes she holds up a little lamp which casts a strange new light over thoughts that hid in darkness. But if I have an Angel who prays for me in another world, as I

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believe, you have certainly one who prays for you on earth. Yet you hesitate to let her little hand lead you to heaven. In your place, I should not hesitate.'

'A man must think these things out for himself, I suppose,' said Michael, shrugging his shoulders. 'Am I so ethereal a being that I can be wafted into heaven on the breath of a woman's prayers?'

'Be thankful if you get in on any terms,' advised the old man, grimly, and yet smiling. 'For my part, I have taken up, and worn humbly for a woman's sake, fetters which during her life I despised, and which since her death I have come to wear gladly enough for my own. I find all I need down there,' he nodded towards the spire of the village church. 'I never leave this shanty except to go there, and never shall, if I can help it. Ah, well! We travel doubtless by different roads to one goal, and the telescopes through which we endeavour to perceive the same God are not all alike, but suited to our different visions.'

'You should write a book, sir, to prove that any religion is better than none,' said Michael, with an inflection of satire in his voice.

'It needs no proof. And you can see I am writing,' he pointed to a table strewn with papers. 'The fever of the pen is one that is only cured by death. I have been working at a book, in my unlimited leisure, for years.'

'A book written in these surroundings should be a beautiful one,' said Michael.

'You can put no beauty into your book,' said the hermit, 'that has not first passed through your own soul.'

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CHAPTER XIV

LATE in the afternoon of his arrival in London Michael went to call upon Mrs. Roath and her daughter in Eaton Place, where, as Edith had informed him, they were staying with her great-uncle, Colonel Bertwald.

Mrs. Roath did not appear, but after a moment's waiting Edith entered the sitting-room on the ground floor, into which he had been ushered.

She was dressed in deep mourning and looked pale and tired.

'How good of you to come so soon! Uncle George lets us have this room to ourselves, so we shall not be interrupted unless Mamma changes her mind and comes down. She sent you her love, but she was resting and disinclined to move. All this shopping and business are very tiring for her, and not at all in her line.' Edith was talking very fast, in evident nervousness.

'Look here' — she showed him a writing-table covered with letters. 'I spend my time answering them. Mamma won't look at them.'

'How is she?'

'Very strange and restless. Sometimes full of the wildest schemes for her own future, and sometimes so listless that she sits with her hands in her lap without reading or speaking, or taking any notice of anyone for hours.'

'And you?'

Michael spoke tenderly because he was too sympathetic to do otherwise, and Edith flushed and her eyes filled with tears because she was overwrought

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and overtired, wherefore any little kindness moved her thus easily.

'I am all right,' she said. 'I was glad to come away — though buying mourning is dreary work. I hoped the change would do poor Mummy good, but unfortunately Uncle George gets on her nerves. He is such an old bachelor, full of fusses and fads, and with such violent opinions on almost every subject. Perhaps wrangling takes her mind off her sorrow; but it's very fatiguing, even for me, who only listen.'

'What in heaven's name do they wrangle about?'

'Everything in turn. Last night it was the franchise. Uncle George has worked out an elaborate scheme for its reform.' Edith's face became animated as usual when she was talking; and she looked very pretty, leaning a little towards her visitor with her elbow on a small table covered with *bric-à-brac*, and her chin in her hand. 'He wants to abandon all property qualifications, and give one vote to every male citizen who can show that he is earning his own living, and who has passed a certain qualifying examination on leaving school. Soldiers, sailors, and members of the police force would have one each as a right; non-commissioned officers, two; and commissioned in exact proportion to their rank and length of service. Extra votes would be made the reward of public service in every rank of life. For instance, mayors, judges, governors of colonies, cabinet ministers, and so on would have extra votes attached to their offices. Colleges, including technical colleges, would have votes attached to their degrees. Honours granted to distinguished men would carry a number of votes

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with them. In effect, his scheme carried out would, he says, give the privilege of voting to workers, and withhold it from idlers; and bring us near the ideal of being governed by the intelligent minority instead of by the senseless majority.'

'I am no politician,' said Michael, shrugging his shoulders; 'it sounds like mere common sense to me.'

'Poor Uncle George! It is the polite indifference of his hearers which maddens him,' she said, reproachfully. 'He is bursting with wrath at so many injustices and anomalies. Would you believe it, men in the public services, civil or military, slaving away in the most unhealthy parts of the Empire, vitally interested in its welfare, exiled from home in its interests, obliged to part from their children, and often their wives — men of vast experience and tried ability who have served their country for years — have no vote at all! While the Whitechapel receiver of stolen goods and alien birth, who has never done a hand's turn of work for the public welfare in his life, gets one. It all sounds incredibly topsy-turvy, as he puts it, and indefensible. But Mamma must needs take the opposite side, and defend the property qualification vigorously. So they had a battle royal, and it ended in Uncle George's rushing out of the room and slamming the door. He can't stand much contradiction from anyone, and none from a woman. It doesn't mean he isn't fond of her. You know what one's relations are like.'

'I only have one relation in the world.'

'You are lucky.'

'Is that your uncle's portrait?'

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'Yes.'

Michael looked up at the fine old face in the picture over the mantelpiece.

Choleric dark eyes shot defiance at the beholder from the shelter of bristling white eyebrows, and a heavy military moustache hid the mouth above the obstinate out-thrust chin.

On the right of the portrait, low down, hung a red velvet *plaque*, and in the centre of that a pearl-framed miniature — the replica of the one in Mr. Edyvean's locket.

'Who is this?' he asked, almost involuntarily, and before he had time to reflect.

'Uncle George's sister, my great-aunt Elizabeth. She was separated from her first husband under rather painful circumstances and the family cast her off. When her first husband died she married a son of Lord Daberlon, and *he* quarrelled with *his* family in consequence.'

Michael stopped her. He felt as though he were surprising a friend's secret.

'I didn't mean to ask that,' he said, 'but I was struck by her likeness to your mother.'

'Yes, Mamma *is* like her,' said Edith, tranquilly. 'From all I have heard, however, she was not an aunt to be proud of. I don't know why Uncle George keeps her miniature hung up, for they hadn't spoken for years before she died.'

'He seems to be rather a peppery gentleman.'

'He has his ideas. One of them is that women should be completely subject to men, and have no opinions of their own,' said Edith, smiling.

'Does he approve of your profession?'

'He would have preferred me to marry, or to

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settle down with Mamma in the conventional way; as indeed I would do if she wanted me,' Edith said, in a softened voice.

'I can't conceive her not wanting you,' cried Michael, warmly.

'We understand each other,' Edith answered. 'Don't look so unhappy.'

'I can't bear to think of your doing hard work — seeing horrible ugly sights, suffering — torture,' he stammered. 'You so — forgive me — pretty, and with everything before you.'

'If I were not pretty,' said Edith, looking at him kindly, yet with that air of detachment and calm that from the first had piqued and interested Michael; 'you would not, I think, see any reason why I should not devote myself to good works. And no one can deny that caring for the sick must be a good work. Then say to yourself, my friend, that a woman's beauty lasts but a short time; and that if it should by chance give any pleasure to a number of sick and sorrowful people during that little period, it is not altogether wasted, even though it should never belong' — her pale cheek glowed — 'to one particular man: for that is the thought in your mind.'

Michael did not deny it.

'Now let us talk no more about me,' said Edith. 'I should like to hear of you. You are going to Fort Aloysius?'

'Yes, I am going.'

'I wish Mamma could find something of the kind you are going to seek,' said Edith, sighing vaguely. 'It is very pitiful to see her.'

'Why should you wish her to believe what you

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don't believe yourself? I am quoting your own words,' he said, quickly.

Edith's beautiful eyes met his, and he saw that they were filled with tears.

'It is strange how a great sorrow alters one's point of view,' she said humbly. 'I am not so self-satisfied — so sure of my own wishes, as I was, before my father died. I find it is difficult, almost impossible, to believe that this yearning to meet one's beloved dead again — to make oneself worthy of meeting them again — can be given one for nothing.'

Michael had an engagement to dine with Mrs. Carseleigh and go to the Gaiety, but as he dressed for dinner he found himself regretting it, and wishing that he was dining at his club and going to bed early instead; for his sympathies with Edith were very strongly aroused, and he felt disinclined to exert himself to be amusing or to be amused.

But before he had been five minutes at the Savoy, where he awaited the lady, his mood was affected by the cheerfulness of one or two greetings which he received; and by the time Mrs. Carseleigh arrived, he had partially recovered his spirits.

Many eyes were turned in her direction as she effected her somewhat languid and self-conscious entry: one rather large hand grasping the light wrap that had fallen from her too *décolleté* shoulders, and the other lifting the hem of a sufficiently conspicuous sea-green dress, to display a golden shoe.

The first glance attracted, for there was a certain grace in the outline of the tall slight figure; the wealth of auburn hair framed an oval face of

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startling pallor, with large light eyes, and the whiteness of the shoulders and arms challenged criticism. But a nearer inspection disappointed; the pallid skin possessed that coarseness of texture which sometimes accompanies red hair, the lipless mouth betrayed the discontent of feeble health and spirits, and the rounded shoulders and hollow chest suggested anæmia.

Michael was not blind however to the attention his companion excited as he conducted her to the little table decked with specimen roses, where several attentive waiters, with energy and deference proportionate to his known wealth, awaited the arrival of the great Alexander Ferry's only son.

Mrs. Carseleigh was not blind either. She glanced to the right and to the left, made a certain commotion over settling down, taking off her long gloves, placing her enormous ostrich-feather fan, etc., and then leaning her white elbows on the table, and assuming a somewhat *dégagée* attitude, as she fingered a row of suspiciously large pearls, she began telling him some amusing stories of Cairo, and urged him to return thither the following winter.

'It's not what it was, but still it would be difficult to find a jollier place to loaf in.'

Michael laughed and shook his head.

'My loafing days are over.'

'You are going to follow in your father's footsteps, make more money and become a multi-millionaire?' she said, clasping her hands.

'I have no ambition that way.'

'Tell me,' she said, leaning a little towards him; 'or of course don't tell me if you don't like, is it true that you are going to be married?'

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'I am going to be married, but since the date isn't definitely settled, we won't talk about it,' he said, with the unconscious authority born of habit.

'Not for the world,' she said, piqued; 'only — it is a little difficult to think of you as a married man, Michael.' Her friendship with Mr. Ferrys had not been of long duration, but a few weeks' acquaintance with a man usually sufficed with Mrs. Carseleigh for an interchange of Christian names. 'You don't mind my saying — I do hope she's worthy of you, dear old man.'

Michael laughed aloud.

'Have some more champagne, Lilah, and don't for heaven's sake talk such nonsense,' he said, gaily.

'Well, I won't; and I won't ask questions, or at least only one. Is it Marjory Wulsin?'

'No, it isn't. I scarcely know Lady Marjory; but that reminds me: I'll call on the Duchess to-morrow. I said I would, and I forgot.'

'*She* won't forget. I watched her when you were talking to the girl at Ascot. You admired her very much then. Didn't you?'

'Then, now, and always. She is one of the prettiest girls I ever saw,' said Michael, gallantly. 'Must we talk of her now? I'd so much rather hear some more about Cairo.'

'You might let me forget Cairo. If you only knew how thankful I am to be away from the place!' she sighed. 'I'm frightfully ill, you know.'

'You don't look it.' His eyes were wandering. Suddenly his face grew puzzled. 'Lilah, don't look round for a moment, and then take a glance to the right, and see if you recognise a lady in a scarlet

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dress who has been staring hard at us and has just bowed to me. I don't know her from Adam, but her face is somehow familiar.'

'What is she like?'

'A thousand years old, with a nondescript reddish face, and a gown made in the year one.'

After a few more words Mrs. Carseleigh took the required observation with an adroitness born of practice.

Then she laughed.

'She'll take precious good care not to bow to *me*,' she said, and displayed a row of small even teeth in a merriment not convincing. 'I remember her. She was a fellow passenger of mine from Cairo, where I met her first. A Mrs. Kitson or Catson, or some such name. I suppose she met you in Cairo too?'

'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy!' said Michael, with a laugh. 'Mrs. Kelson of Cwmcoel, by Jove! I seem to be always giving her opportunities.'

'What do you mean?'

'Nothing. I've only spoken to the lady once, and should be rather glad to know I was never going to speak to her again. She must have a hawk's eye and the memory of an elephant to have spotted me.'

'That sort of woman never forgets anything or anybody,' said Mrs. Carseleigh, viciously. 'One comfort is that she got herself so disliked at Cairo that nobody would dream of believing anything she said out there. She lives in Wales, doesn't she?'

'Very likely,' said Michael. 'What! no *babas au rhum*? and I ordered them especially for you.'

'I'm not a bit hungry,' said Mrs. Carseleigh, plaintively. 'I told you I was ill, but you weren't

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listening. It was an awful effort to come at all to-night, if you only knew.'

'Poor little thing!' said Michael.

Sympathy cost him nothing, and Mrs. Carseleigh required a plentiful supply, as he knew of old. She thought that delicacy made her interesting, and detailed the symptoms of fainting, etc., which had assailed her during the afternoon's effort to entertain unwelcome visitors.

'Somehow, I don't know how it is, everything seems to fall on me,' she said, piteously opening her eyes like a child — a thirty-year-old child, with a powdered face and painted lips, and with some odd memories lurking perhaps in the brain-cells beneath the wonderful auburn hair. 'Mamma is over sixty and half an invalid, and thinks of nothing on earth but my brother Harry's girls who live with her, and who are just at the tiresome age: girls of fifteen and sixteen, who can't do a thing to help her.'

Michael thought in the circumstances it was not wonderful that the visiting married daughter should be expected to take her share of the responsibility, but he did not betray his thoughts; only smiled and said:

'Rough luck; but I hope you manage to squeeze a little fun out of life on the whole.'

'I should if Jim wasn't for ever wiring for me to go back to Egypt. It's funny he never realises how delicate I am, but it's not his fault, poor boy. He never understands. No, Michael, no more champagne. I never *do* take anything of that sort, and I've had two glasses already.'

'Let's start, then,' said Michael.

They had to pass Mrs. Kelson, and she was not

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the woman to let her prey escape. Though Michael averted his eyes, her voice obliged him to see her.

'How-d 'ye-do, Mr. Ferrys. You remember me? Cairo. The hermit's glen, as they call it, and that poor mad Mr. Edyvean. Have you been down there lately? and how is our dear little Winefride?'

'I came up to-day,' said Michael, civilly.

Mrs. Carseleigh had wisely passed on in search of her cloak.

'Come and see me — 150 Grosvenor Gardens,' said Mrs. Kelson, with an encouraging smile. 'Stay — can you dine to-morrow night? Some *great* friends of the Gryffydds coming.'

Michael thanked her and declined.

The meeting had quenched his newly-recovered cheerfulness, and he wished anew that he had not come. He eyed Mrs. Carseleigh rather discontentedly, as her drooping form, with its falling wrap gathered about her too *voyante* dress, emerged from the doorway of the ladies' dressing-room.

'She's underbred — bad form,' he thought, 'and she doesn't improve in manner, or appearance, or anything else. And under pretext of kindness I encouraged her to gad about like this when she'd better by far be nursing her sick mother, or toddling back to that ass of a Carseleigh, who believes in her. He'll drink himself to death if nobody looks after him. However, I suppose his habits form her best excuse for coming away — poor soul!'

It was not in Michael's nature to be cross, but he found it a little difficult to conceal his depression, and was obliged to plead fatigue when she reproached him for being out of spirits on their arrival at the Gaiety.

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In the glare of the brilliantly-lighted stage, and the noise of the orchestra — for they had seats in the front row of stalls — he found himself thinking of Edith Roath's grave beautiful eyes, and recalling the low tones of her calm voice and the restfulness of her quiet presence. Not the quiet of dulness, never that; but the quiet of controlled force and depth. More than ever he grew impatient of Mrs. Carseleigh's fatiguing affectations, and manner alternating between the hysterical giggle of forced merriment and the pout of reproachful sentimentality. Her attitudinising annoyed him profoundly; whether she leaned forward with bare hands clasped about crossed knees, gazing with simulated intensity of interest at the singer; or whether, relaxing into languor, she leaned back with half-closed eyes and a be-ringed forefinger supporting her drooping head.

'It doesn't suit me to be made to think,' reflected Michael, gloomily; but her piteous comments on his absentmindedness filled him presently with remorse, and he exerted himself to throw off his melancholy, aided by the efforts of the comedian who principally held the stage; so that he was better company during the drive to her mother's house in Kensington than he had been in the early part of the evening.

Nevertheless, having deposited his companion at her own door, and refused to come in for the whisky-and-soda she offered, he drove off alone in the hansom with a great sense of relief.

It seemed to him, in his new-born fastidiousness, extraordinary that Lilah Carseleigh should ever have amused or interested him even at his idlest; and this was hard upon the poor lady in question, for it was Michael, and not she, who had changed.

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CHAPTER XV

THE next morning Michael was not very much surprised to receive a summons to Eaton Place.

Mrs. Roath wanted to see him for a few moments in the morning, when she was at her best, if it suited him.

It suited him very well, since he was not leaving for Scotland until the night train.

He was taken upstairs this time, and in the drawing-room found Edith and her mother, and the fiery Colonel Bertwald, all awaiting him.

'My uncle wanted to see you,' said Mrs. Roath, holding out her hand from the couch whereon, as usual, she was resting.

'I knew your father,' said Colonel Bertwald, darting a glance of keen inquiry at the young man from his dark eyes, and looking as though he had just walked out of the picture Michael had seen downstairs. 'I had a very great respect for him.'

Michael made a suitable response. His *nonchalance* was always tempered in the presence of his elders by a certain deference, which won their favour.

'When did you leave South Africa?' asked the old gentleman.

'I haven't been out there since my father died, nor for some time earlier.'

'Why not?' This was disconcerting. 'Surely he had immense interests in the country?'

'He had at one time.'

'What was his opinion of the condition of things out there?'

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'Mr. Ferrys' answer to your question was significant, Uncle George,' said Mrs. Roath impatiently.

'He used to be full of enthusiasm,' said Colonel Bertwald.

'Yes, he was. A good many years ago.'

'It is a good many years ago that I saw him last. He was making an immense deal of money.'

'At immense cost to himself. But he had practically parted with most of his interests in South Africa before he died. He had wound up his affairs there and was coming home for good.'

Colonel Bertwald's fiery eyes expressed disapproval so plainly that Michael answered his unspoken thought.

'Not desertion, sir. His heart had always been set on entering English politics one day; but as you say, he was making money, and his business instincts overpowered his ambition. But it dawned upon him suddenly, and, as it turned out, too late, that his life was slipping away, and his ambition unfulfilled. So he determined to cut himself free from the country he'd worked in. He wrote me he should do better service in Parliament, and he was as keen on work at fifty-seven as he'd ever been.'

'I read a good deal about him, in the papers, when he died. A wonderful career!'

'His father's was even more wonderful. Both were self-made men; but my grandfather, who was only a ship's surgeon, laid the foundation that my father built on.'

'And what are *you* going to do?'

Michael looked from him to Mrs. Roath, and shrugged his shoulders very slightly. Edith's face was hidden; her arm rested on the mantelpiece, and

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she was looking into the fire, which had been lighted in defiance of all Colonel Bertwald's rules, because his niece found the day damp and chilly.

'You don't mean to say that at your age, and with your command of wealth, and your intelligence — you look intelligent enough —' said Colonel Bertwald indignantly, 'that you'll sit down and content yourself with spending the money your father and grandfather made? Why the deuce can't you carry out your father's ambition? We want fresh blood, young blood ——'

'Above all, we want money,' murmured Mrs. Roath, but below her breath; and her choleric uncle did not catch the purport of her murmur.

'If you're half as clever as my niece here and her daughter make you out to be —' said the septuagenarian enthusiast, eagerly; and was interrupted by Mrs. Roath.

'Dear Uncle George, what business is it of ours?'

'Everybody's business is my business. I'm an old man, and I knew his father,' said Colonel Bertwald, crossly. 'I'm not going to apologise to the lad for showing my interest in him.'

'I hope not, sir,' said Michael, and he laughed frankly.

'Besides, how do you know he's not on *our* side?' said Mrs. Roath, with that softly mocking smile.

'I wonder you do not blush when you say *our* side, Elspeth. When in the memory of man has a Bertwald been anything but a reformer?'

'Edith and I are Roaths. And I am a fine old crusted Tory. Indeed, if I could have my way we should return to Absolute Monarchy. I would rather be ruled by a man than a mob,' she said lightly.

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Michael intervened hastily, for Edith raised her head, and her eyes signalled a command.

'I know scarcely anything of English politics,' he said. 'I was educated out of England; and since I left college I have been a wanderer over the face of the earth. As for my qualifications, I have none; unless being a bit of a linguist would be of any use.'

'Use! of course it's of use; opens up the literature of other countries, which to most men's minds are closed treasure-houses,' said Colonel Bertwald, emphatically. 'But it's time you started your career. What's your age?'

'Six-and-twenty.'

'Very good, very good. Not too old and not too young. Think it over,' said the old gentleman, 'and I think you'll see that it's every man's duty to be a good citizen. If I had my way the drones should be put to death.'

'I suppose I am a drone,' said Michael, with a deprecatory twinkle.

'You needn't be, you needn't be. All your life before you,' said the old soldier stoutly, yet with a note of envy in his voice. 'Youth, health, wealth — Well, well! I've had my day, but I would I could inspire the young ones with half my energy. Half my energy. The knowledge of what they want, and the power to express it clearly and simply. People drown their meaning in words. Avoid that in speaking. You look as if you had the gift of the gab.'

Michael and Edith exchanged a swift and fleeting smile.

'Dear Uncle George, you have not given him much chance to prove it.'

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'He'll get his chance fast enough. Let your motto be Simplicity, my boy. As one grows older and wiser, one combs out one's ideas in private, until they become clear, and above all very simple. Great truths are always simple. Only fools are impressed by involvedness and mistake it for profundity. These also mistake lucidity for foolishness, with some show of reason, since they cannot believe that that which even *they* can understand may yet be wisdom. And remember that originality always excites the ridicule of the many.' Colonel Bertwald's eyes glowed beneath his snow-white brows, and his knotted hand trembled as he raised it and shook his finger at Michael. 'Despise ridicule. Have the courage of your convictions.'

'And if I have no convictions?'

'Go and get some, sir. I don't know what you modern young men are made of,' he groaned. 'However, if you've lost the power of thinking for yourself, the next best thing is to let someone think for you.' His sanguine spirit recovered. 'At least you can follow your leader loyally and faithfully. Well, well!' he stopped short, warned by a certain suppressed impatience in his niece's manner. 'You'll bear my words in mind, and when you want introductions — to make a beginning — come and see me, and I shall be at your service. I've lived in London all my life, and know most people; and if you've lived abroad all your life, why, that in itself might help you a bit.'

Michael thanked him, and he hurried out of the room, full of importance and energy.

'He tires me more than anyone in the world,' said Mrs. Roath, closing her eyes wearily.

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'A talk with Mr. Ferrys will rest you, Mummy,' said Edith, 'and I am going out.'

'Why should you go out, my darling?'

'It is easier to talk *à deux* than *à trois*,' said Edith, with perfect simplicity; 'and Mr. Ferrys and I said our say yesterday. I daresay I shall be back before he is gone.'

She vanished, and Michael once more drew a low seat beside Mrs. Roath's sofa.

The false excitement which had burned in her cheeks and lighted her dark eyes during their last meeting at Clode, had all died away, and she looked very pale and frail; with the great circles about her black-fringed eyes heavily accentuated.

With his quickness for observing detail, Michael perceived that the individual taste that distinguished her had made a frantic effort to cope with the ugliness of conventional mourning. She looked, in consequence, even less like the widow than she had looked like the wife of an old-fashioned English High Church Tory squire. Though her *chiffon* draperies were as black, they were also as light, as soot; falling over an undersheath of white, which emerged spotless at neck and wrist.

The slender form was still outlined by the favourite sleeveless jacket; but the dull black cloth which formed its substance was edged with faint silver.

The pearls she loved gleamed dimly about her dusky throat and in her delicate ears. The glory of the sunshine had faded, and her day of vivid glow and colour was over-past; but there remained the subtle attractive atmosphere of the night of her sorrow; a suggestion aided by that soft moonlit darkness of drapery, the jet of her hair, the

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starry brilliance of her eyes, and the pallor of her elfin face.

Michael said to himself that this woman would never lose the subtle charm that could neither be defined nor eluded. It would cling to her until the day of her death; that mystery of attraction which, like a spirit made visible, looked through her eyes and arrested the attention of the passer-by.

He noticed, on the usual elbow-table that held her cigarette-box and ash-tray, and gold cup filled with violets, that the exquisitely bound volumes of poetry and philosophy had given place to a large old shabby leather Bible, with faded ribbon markers, which he recognised as having belonged to Mr. Roath.

He looked at the little frail mourner upon the sofa, and as he looked he was filled with compassion, and she knew that he was filled with compassion.

'Edith is going back to work,' she said suddenly.

'What will you do without her?'

'I shall be better without her. The thought that I was spoiling her life, and letting her waste her precious youth and strength on me when her heart and soul are in her work, would kill me outright,' said Mrs. Roath, vehemently. Then with one of her sudden changes of mood she began to laugh. 'If you could read the reams of advice I've had from maiden aunts and childless cousins about my daughter when Edith went to school, when she went to college, when she went to the hospital; all urging me to keep her at home to be a comfort to me: pointing out that she could keep house for me. As if any woman would be such a fool as to relinquish the reins of her household before she was bedridden. I haven't sympathy with all modern developments,

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but when I remember what the lives of some of my contemporaries have been! Sometimes three or four able-bodied women, sitting round waiting for husbands who didn't come; taking it in turns to arrange the flowers, and order the dinner for their mamma, who could have done it all so much better for herself; and who might have enjoyed calling on her friends if custom hadn't dictated that a daughter must come with her and sit listening to the conversation that would have been interesting but for that embarrassing young presence. Thank heaven that the girls, even of our own class, may "live their own lives" — as the jargon of the day runs — a little more naturally now.'

'But surely you would have a young girl sheltered by her mother's care?' said Michael, smiling.

'I don't know,' said Mrs. Roath. 'Under normal conditions youth seeks youth, and playmates naturally become lovers. Nature intended both lads and lasses to leave their parents and fly to their chosen mates and equals, while they were young. If modern artificial custom prevents this, yet it doesn't make the prolonged companionship of mother and daughter, however delightful, an equal nor even a natural one. The normal mother may cling to her child, but the normal child openly or secret craves liberty during her youth; however glad she may be, later on, to return to her old home. Motherliness is often only another name for tyranny.'

'Yes. That I have observed,' said Michael.

'In our own small neighborhood at Clode I have seen a quiet girl who read and thought and wanted to be let alone, forced on to the treadmill of society, because her mother had been forced to it in *her*

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youth; and a rosy country maid who loved the outdoor life to which she had been bred, and who would have been an ideal wife for a plain sporting squire or parson — taken to London year after year, fretting and bored and losing her roses, and at last falling a victim to her mother's worldliness, and joining in her schemes for the entrapping of eldest sons. Pah! they are dumb, these young girls, and have no one to speak for them, but I watched the farce for years; and when the time came I would not rush to London and take a furnished house and plot for invitations from hostesses I did not know. I had money enough, and wits enough to make a success of it if that had been my miserable ambition. But I let my child follow her bent. If she had been a little timid unenterprising thing, clinging to me and to her home, then also I would have let her follow her bent. My relatives were naturally shocked. It is the normal attitude of relations. They think it a duty and feel it a pleasure to find fault. But it is not in my nature to be influenced by anyone's opinion but my own,' she remarked, with equal truth and candour. 'Besides, these were the lineal descendants of our great-grandparents, who were scandalised because their daughters took to wearing jackets instead of shawls. The back numbers of *Punch* are very edifying. They show you that people are always shocked at the wrong things.'

She leaned back breathless, with glittering eyes, and a bright rose flush on her small delicate face.

'They all drive me mad with their suggestions now. They know so exactly how a widowed mother ought to behave. I am to go and make a home for Humphrey at Clode! Poor darling! a nice home I

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should make! He is dying to start a thousand innovations, and the fear of hurting my feelings would hamper him at every turn. Besides, I always hated his wife.'

'His wife!' Michael was startled.

'I mean his wife that will be, of course,' said Mrs. Roath, drawing her finely-pencilled inky brows together, as she always did when the dulness of male perception irritated her. 'I don't know in the least *who* she will be; but I don't pretend to like the thought of some odious chit getting hold of my boy, and making him do what she chooses and turning my home of twenty-seven years upside down to suit her horrid taste.'

'I see.'

'Then my uncle ——'

'I can quite see *that* wouldn't do,' Michael said, hastily.

'Did you ever see such an impatient, fierce creature as he is? Always mad about something, and never satisfied with anybody. I would as soon live over a volcano,' she said, with a vehemence that oddly resembled the impatience she denounced. 'But when I speak of taking a little flat in London, he becomes rabid; pointing out the number of empty bedrooms in this house. And poor Tom rushed here to beg me to share his rooms.'

'Why not?'

'Why not! Because he is very well as he is. And because, as you know very well, a bachelor likes his rooms to himself. He is surely past the age of mothering,' she retorted. 'And now that Frank has joined his regiment — Besides, they are all well off. It's not as though they needed help from me,

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or as if we should live more comfortably if we all clubbed together. Quite the contrary. We should be far more comfortable apart. When they were children and needed me, did I ever fail them?' she said pathetically, 'though Heaven knows whether I was ever particularly suited to be the mother of a family.'

Michael was willing to agree that she looked less like the mother of a family than almost anyone he had ever seen; but he left these words unspoken; nor did she give him time to utter any opinion on the subject, being gifted, as she was, with a fair share of her uncle's eloquence.

'So I have decided that my flat shall be in Paris. Some old nook, probably, with a winding staircase, and corner cupboards, and a *concierge* delightful if heavily bribed; and lace-curtained windows through which I shall peep at the Champs Elysées; and white lilac in tall jars standing in sunny corners. I can see it all, and even smell the faint aroma of delicious coffee, and bread made with yeast and baked in wood ashes. And I will have my stout Marie or Céline in the kitchen bending over her *pot au feu*, and always ready to laugh and talk. Don't you *feel* sometimes that nostalgia of Paris?'

He nodded sympathetically.

'I was at home, on the other side, in my childhood,' she said softly, 'that one never forgets. And because the people with whom I had to associate were wholly unsympathetic to me, so much the more I learned to take great pleasure in my surroundings. For instance, one of the clearest memories of my childhood is a laburnum covered with golden bloom. It can't have been always in flower, even in Paris,

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can it? But one looked in at the window of the room where a fool made learning distasteful to me through the bright spring mornings. As for the flowering ribes, the pungent odour of it even now brings me back an almost sick yearning for the days when I saw only the landscape, and dismissed from my mind's eye the tiresome figures that dragged me by the hand for walks. . . . What have I to do with London fogs? I will have my *pied-à-terre* in Paris, and from thence travel wherever I choose. I shall fill my empty days. I shall wander at will. Even when one is unhappy there is a certain consolation in being free, don't you think?' she said appealingly.

'I have never been anything else since I left college,' said Michael.

'And I have never known the sensation before in my life. But it is just beginning to dawn upon me, what it would to be get away from all these.' She stretched out her little hand towards a pile of black-edged envelopes, stamped and ready for posting, which Edith had presumably forgotten; and the gesture seemed to comprehend also her desire to fly from her uncle's kindness and overbearing personality, and the uncongenial atmosphere of his abode.

'But you can't go off quite alone. You need some one to take care of you,' he cried, with that chivalrous desire to protect her which she never failed to evoke in mankind.

'Only a slave, and I have one,' she said indifferently. 'An honest devoted old thing, very energetic, and full of the kind of common sense I never had. A maid of the good old-fashioned upperclass type. She loves tiresome details like luggage and tickets, and packing and nursing one when one's ill. She'd

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follow me to the end of the world — and that is where I shall probably take her,' she added, with the sudden irradiating smile that made her look like a tiny elfin edition of Edith. 'I pine and burn for sunshine. I shall go to the East. Always I have longed to go, and always I have been restless. Who knows what influences of heredity may be working in my blood? Perhaps when I get there my wander-fever may be healed.'

Michael looked at her, and saw that the dreaming and desire of years, though apparently slain by grief, were already springing to life again. Hers was not a spirit to be crushed permanently.

She seemed, with her curious characteristic quickness, to divine his thoughts.

'Ah, you think I forget! Is it possible? Don't you know that always — always — his presence will be with me?' she said, under her breath. There in that world of the invisible with which *you* say you have no affinity, but which is close — close to me — he stands beside me, on guard. If it were a thousand years, he would wait. If I committed a thousand sins, he would forgive. If I were loathsome in the sight of others, he would yet see me always as beautiful and wonderful. His love was inarticulate; he had no trick of words; but none the less *I* knew it obsessed him, and that it will for ever blind the eyes of his soul to my faults. His love remained silent, deep, unchanging, through all my restlessness, and the years of my discontent,' she said, weeping. 'But *you*, *you* saw him perhaps only as a dull old-fashioned narrow-minded man ——'

'I!' cried Michael, warmly, 'I saw in him a type of all that is best and noblest in manhood. A man of

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character; a worker, and simple, honest as the day, faithful to the best traditions he knew.'

'Faithful — yes,' she said, clasping her little frail hands. 'Faithful for ever and ever. He was all you say — and God bless you for saying it — to those who surrounded him. But to me he is something more. A soul awful in its very simplicity and truth and purity.' She looked wistfully at Michael. 'Even to think of him now brings me peace — as the thought of him never did when he was living; for then the fact that in mind and brain he was slower than I, made me impatient; even sometimes he bored me a little. Oh, why do I put it into words?' She writhed back among the cushions. 'But it is only to tell you how acutely, *acutely*, I realise now the difference between the mortal brain and the human soul. Yet there are those so dull of perception that they can see no difference; those who must therefore be blind to the beautiful forgiving dumb soul that gazes bewildered and beseeching from the eyes of a fool who is mocked, or a child that does not understand why it is punished. But, thank God, I always knew that his soul was greater than mine; just as I know now that his spirit is nearer mine than ever before.'

Michael uttered a sound of understanding and sympathy.

'It is when I am alone that I feel it most,' she said; 'so bid me God-speed on my journey. I have wanted to go to the East, you know, ever since I was a little girl; and now that I am all alone I feel curiously — don't laugh at me,' she said imploringly, 'like the little girl I used to be, though I am not any more even young. Yet, oddly, I know I shouldn't

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enjoy my wanderings half so much if I didn't know I had prepared and furnished a nest to fly home to whenever I was tired; full of my own old treasures and the rubbish that a woman loves, and which to her make home wherever they may be. It is strange, strange, that in my sorrow, even in my remorse, I am also nearer happiness than I have been ever since I was the little girl I used to be; though I have not touched it yet — though I may say I have never touched it — which makes me sometimes wonder if there can really be a just God.'

Michael stooped his head, and kissed the frail hand, and bade her God-speed with all his heart; and she touched his dark hair lightly and tenderly, as though he had been one of her own boys.

'You too,' she said, 'God speed you too on your quest. Something will wake in you presently, I think.'

As he went downstairs he met Edith.

'I did not go out; I am going now. I wanted so much to ask you what you thought of her?'

'Much, much better; calmer; and best of all, with her interest in life re-awakening sooner than one would have dared to hope.'

Edith smiled.

'Whatever she did would be done quickly. The old vicar came from Clode to see her yesterday. He is so very gentle, and so very venerable and good, and looked up to my father so sincerely that nothing he said could jar. Poor old man, he has always been at her feet, an unconscious worshipper, and none the less sincere. He is much distressed that she will not return to Clode, but unshaken in the con-

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viction that whatever she decides must be for the best.'

'She has an intensely attractive personality, something spiritual seems to emanate from her,' said Michael, hesitating.

Edith nodded.

'Whatever it is, and wherever she goes, she will never be lonely,' she said, simply; 'those who meet her, even though it be but once, are her friends. Yet I can't bear to think of her setting forth on her travels, even with old Alison to take care of her. She seems so small and fragile to wander forth alone into the wide world; accustomed as she is to be so surrounded by my father's care and love.'

'Tell me,' said Michael, with a sudden impulse. 'Given the continued existence of the individual soul after death, which would you say was the greater — that of your mother with her vivid personality or ——'

'My father's,' said Edith instantly, 'because he was so steadfast. So free from all that was little or vain or self-conscious. So utterly sincere; immovably upright; even though he was not clever as she is clever. Her spirit is restless, changeable — his must be the greater. Then she has spoken to you of her fancy that he is with her always?'

'Rather of her intense conviction.'

'Call it what you will,' said Edith, sighing, 'this I know, and this only — that if it were possible — if he could — he would have chosen to be with her, watching over her until the hour of her death.'

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CHAPTER XVI

'DEAREST LADY GRYFFYDD,' wrote Mrs. Kelson, from her house in Grosvenor Place. 'We are such old friends that I have no hesitation in writing to you as I should write to no one else. I mark this letter *Private*, and then I know that it is only as though we were chatting over the fire, and so I can speak quite, *quite* freely.

'I am inclined to think, dearest, that your judgment, after all, was sounder than mine in your *continued distrust* of Mr. Ferrys. If you remember, I took his part *warmly* when we were talking about him the other day, and thought your scruples rather far-fetched; but I did honestly believe that, as I told you, a reformed rake made the best husband. Now I begin to wonder if I was not led away by my desire to think the best of everyone, into being too sanguine about his improvement. After all, an engagement to a sweet girl like Winefride ought to keep him as straight as though he were actually married; and in fact, *straighter*, since after marriage there would not be the same fear of losing her.

'What I am going to tell you now will not, I fear, surprise you, dearest, as it did me, since you have been so suspicious of him from the first; in fact you will be justified in saying "I told you so." But there it is! I suppose I am credulous; worldly wisdom seems to pass over my head. And he looked so nice and *so* handsome, I suppose one ought *not* to be influenced by people's looks, but one *is;* and even last night, sorry as I was to see him under the circumstances, I caught myself asking him to dinner

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from sheer pity, and perhaps the feeling that I might be able to warn him kindly that he was *not* acting very wisely, nor even *rightly* by our dear little Winefride. Not that he needs much warning, with his experience, alas! in such matters; but he has never been an engaged man before, and perhaps does not understand that he ought now to be more careful, and not be seen dining *tête-a-tête* in public restaurants with — but there I go, making excuses for him again. Forgive my weakness, dearest, but as I said, he is such a nice-looking boy, and after all in years, from *our* point of view, *only* a boy. I can assure you I don't feel the least inclined to make excuses for *her*. I mean the person he was with, of whom, unhappily, I know only too much, and far more than she guesses. I saw her take a good look at me when she thought I was busy with my dinner; but as you always say, I have eyes in the back of my head, and I knew what she was up to fast enough, though I made no sign whatever. Of course I saw in a moment that she wanted to see if I *looked as if I meant to recognise her:* as she perceived immediately that I had no such intention she took care not to meet my eye. If she *had*, however, I meant to give her a look she would not have forgotten in a hurry; as much as to say, *If you think I've forgotten the way you behaved on board-ship you're very much mistaken!* But she was too wise to give me the chance, and hurried past me, which enabled me to get in a word with the young man alone. He was in such a fidget to be after her all the time, that I was sorry to see it; especially as it made him refuse my invitation with more haste than politeness.

'Dearest, *why* do men do these things? Mind,

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I am not saying there is any harm in it as far as *he* is concerned, though I should be sorry to say the same of *her*.

'Mrs. Carseleigh is her horrid name, which puts me in mind of a corpse, I can't think why, except that she affects that sort of dead white complexion (*enamel*) with her really *scarlet* hair. She used to get a great deal of sympathy at Cairo, by going about looking perfectly miserable, with that kind of one-sided droop which takes some people in so easily, and talking in that half-alive languid way one knows so well. I believe Major Carseleigh is drinking himself to death, and I'm bound to say he's a most horrid-looking creature, but she must have known that when she married him, which she pretends was from the schoolroom, but he told me himself she had had seven seasons in Cairo first. So even if she came out at seventeen she can't have been less than four- or five-and-twenty, and in France, as you know, dearest, they "*coiffer Ste. Catherine*" at that age. so don't tell me! She was by way of being a hoyden then, but I suppose she now finds the die-away, misunderstood pose more successful. However that may be, one sees her confiding in *everyone*, and giving away her poor husband to every willing (male) listener she meets; and I will say she contrives, one way and another, to meet a good many.

'*You* would not have been deceived for a moment, but in my weak good nature, I was *for a time*, though several of the residents warned me against her, and one went so far as to call her a *husband-snatcher*. Still, *he* looked such a brute, and I really believed in her delicate health — till I found she could ride for a couple of hours daily before breakfast with Mr.

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Ferrys; and dance till three in the morning four nights a week without turning a hair. I *then* began to prick up my ears, and heard the most awful stories (too long to write). But I continued *just* to bow to her, wishing to err on the side of charity as I'm afraid I do too often — *until* we got on board ship; and there I saw for myself what she was, when she scraped acquaintance with a friend of ours, Lord Rosterleigh, and monopolised him completely. She must have introduced herself to him, and he to her, for to my certain knowledge they had never met before we started; and you may be sure *I* did not lift a finger to make them acquainted. I can't tell you how they went on. He must have known what *I* thought, for he was afraid to come near me. Everyone was talking about them; and even making bets that instead of leaving the ship at Marseilles with the rest of us, as was his known intention, he would go on to London with her: which sure enough he did, in spite of there being so many people on board who knew her husband. He is, as you have probably heard, dearest, rather a notorious man; and everyone says poor Lady Rosterleigh could have divorced him over and over again, but for some reason she will never believe a word against him. But I heard *quite by chance,* from a fellow-passenger whom I asked about them, that on arriving in London she saw them both at the very same hotel she went to for the night.

'This will show you only too plainly the *sort of thing;* and I do think that in your place, and feeling as you do, about Mr. Ferrys, you should ask him to explain himself. If he is taking this Mrs. C. about with him everywhere *now,* what guarantee

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have you that he will not continue to do so after he's married? These red-haired women are very dangerous, and remember she was called a *husband-snatcher*. But I need say no more, for I know you are far more rigid than I am in your ideas, indeed, *I*, if anything, am too lax, and willing to let my fellow creatures go their own way thinking no evil. But in *this* case, *knowing Mrs. C.*, my blood boiled, and I said to myself, No, dear little Winefride and her mother live out of the world and have no idea what is going on, and it is my duty as a friend to warn them. Whatever they do must be done with their eyes *wide* open. Mind, dear Lady Gryffydd, I have only told you *what I saw* and *what I know*. I am not saying there was any harm in *this* case. Only that if Mr. Ferrys wants to avoid *the appearance of evil* (as we are so strictly told to do) he should not be seen alone in public places with the wrong kind of woman; in which case he wouldn't be seen dining alone at a public restaurant with any woman at all, as the right kind *don't do these things*. And it is not as if there were any pretence of joining a party, as we happened to go to the same theatre, and though they didn't see us as we were a long way behind them, I spotted them in a moment. There they were, *à deux*, just as you would expect in such circumstances.

'Well, dearest, I must apologise for the length of this letter, but I have gone into details because I feel in writing a warning of this kind one *can't* be too careful to leave out nothing. I shall be so impatient for your answer; and you need not thank me for the trouble I have taken, though I will frankly own it *has* been difficult to find the time; you know how one is rushed in London. But when it is a question

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of giving a helping hand, I never hesitate; especially where my *friends* are concerned, and indeed I have felt it not only a duty, *but a pleasure*, to write you all this.

Your most affectionate,

AGNETA KELSON.

There had been a slight coolness between Lady Gryffydd and her sister at the beginning of Mrs. Loveden's annual summer visit to Aberfraw, which arose in consequence of some fastidiousness being displayed by Sims, who was not so fond as her mistress was of getting away from London and spending several quiet weeks on the Welsh borderland.

Lady Gryffydd was inclined to reprove Sims for unsociableness, and to champion the cause of her own domestics, who accused the maid of being a fine lady and wishful to give herself airs.

Sims' retort to her equals was that she had kept herself to herself all her life, and proposed to concontinue the process until the end of her days; but in the face of Lady Gryffydd's gentle expostulation she wept so bitterly that the soft heart of her hostess was melted, while Mrs. Loveden began to be annoyed that anyone should lecture her maid besides herself.

Nothing can exceed a Londoner's scorn of a rustic, except perhaps a countryman's contempt for a cockney; so that no more than an outward harmony could be established in the household by the united efforts of the two ladies, aided by the gentle peacemaking Winefride, who was beloved by all parties to the quarrel.

Lady Gryffydd and Mrs. Loveden were a trifle more dignified than usual in their attitude towards

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each other, thus attempting to disguise a faint hidden resentment which rendered both exceedingly uncomfortable.

It was the arrival of Mrs. Kelson's letter, strangely enough, which restored cordiality, for Lady Gryffydd was so anxious to impart the contents, and Mrs. Loveden so eager to hear them, that the grievance was forgotten; and they discussed it eagerly together.

'Mrs. Kelson is a woman of the world,' said Lady Gryffydd.

'But I must say, if you will forgive me, dearest, for saying so of a friend of yours, that she is rather a spiteful one,' said Mrs. Loveden, warmly. 'Why, for instance, this stab at the poor woman because she has red hair? How can she help the colour of her hair?'

'Many people have a prejudice against it,' said Lady Gryffydd, defending her friend. 'I do not say it is just. I am told it is particularly attractive to others, and I cannot say I have any feeling about it one way or the other, myself. But there it is. Besides, the colour of her hair has nothing to do with her conduct.'

'Still, it shows that Mrs. Kelson has unreasonable prejudices. Depend upon it, Mary Theresa, quite a different account of this dinner might be given by a more charitable person. Perhaps Michael has dined with her and her husband in Cairo, and was merely returning their hospitality. And if she has really so many enemies he might well be puzzled to know whom to invite to meet her. Besides, you, and even I, live so much out of the world that we cannot tell what free and easy ways may be fashionable now among younger people.'

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'Mrs. Kelson does not live out of the world, and from what she says it is evidently not the right thing for a lady to dine alone at a restaurant with a gentleman and go to a play. To me it appears quite dreadful, and especially with her poor husband drinking himself to death in Cairo. How can she have the heart to go to a theatre at all in such circumstances?'

'That is nonsense, dearest. The poor woman must need something to distract her thoughts from her misery.'

'One would think you approved her behaviour, Lucy Agnes!'

'I am far from approving of her. I think her most imprudent; but I would not willingly think of her as anything more than imprudent,' said Mrs. Loveden, colouring all over her rather large, waxen countenance.

Lady Gryffydd's pale blue eyes looked beseechingly into her sister's steady sensible grey orbs.

'I am sure I am the last to indulge in rash judgment,' she said, almost weeping, 'and I could not help growing very fond of dear Michael when he was here last. He has such coaxing ways, and he was taken up heart and soul with the plans for rebuilding the Abbey. Nobody could help being touched. But a letter like this upsets me, Lucy Agnes, and revives all my old doubts of him. I feel while he is here with Winefride, all is right; but he is so easy-going and indolent, and has so little real principle, that the moment he is out of her sight he is not much to be depended upon.'

'I do not think the letter proves that, and I think Mrs. Kelson is much biased by her obvious annoy-

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ance that Michael would not accept her invitation to dinner.'

'I never thought of that,' confessed Lady Gryffydd.

'I noticed it directly. She evidently sat down and wrote the letter off in a pet. I daresay, poor thing, she is very sorry by this time that she wrote it at all; and I do hope you won't trouble dear Winefride about it, for she had a long letter from Michael this morning, and looked so happy that I was quite touched to see the brightness of her face.'

'It is not a subject on which I could speak to Winefride, though I am not very good at keeping secrets. Children are so sharp. And besides, she would only fire up if I said a word against Michael, for she and Bernard look upon him as a hero; whereas after all he is only an indolent young man with no religion to keep him straight, and far too much money to spend.'

'By the grace of God, dearest, he may have a religion very soon; for Winefride said her letter was from Fort Aloysius, and I cannot believe she would have looked as radiant as she did if she had not found fresh food for hope in it.'

'She finds fresh food for hope in all he says and does,' said Lady Gryffydd, shaking her head; but her sister uttered a warning *Hush!* for at that moment Winefride came into the room.

She carried in her hands a great jar of dog-rose, and woodland fern, and tall foxglove, which almost hid her slender form. Through the topmost sprays shone her fair hair, and her pretty flushed face and gay blue eyes.

'You look like a ray of sunshine coming into this dark room,' said Mrs. Loveden, fondly.

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'Why is it a dark room? Are your eyes troubling you, Mamma?'

'They are a little weak,' admitted Lady Gryffydd. 'That jar is far too heavy for you, darling. Why not get Barney to carry it?'

'He would knock the branches out of place, and I have taken pains to arrange them.'

'You have so much taste, my dear,' said Mrs. Loveden.

'But she wanders too far hunting for wild flowers and odd weeds, when the gardens are full of flowers,' complained her mother.

'I like the wild ones best, and so does Michael, and I take the garden flowers for the altar.'

'She does all the flowers for the church,' said Lady Gryffydd. 'I don't know who would do them if ——'

'Thekla does them better than I. Wouldn't you like one blind up, Mamma? I don't know how you can see to read your letters.'

'I've only one letter, and a very unpleasant one at that,' said poor Lady Gryffydd.

'Is it Mrs. Kelson?'

'There now! Did I not tell you, Lucy Agnes? What is the use of trying to keep anything to myself in this house?' cried Lady Gryffydd, helplessly. 'I'm sure I don't know how they find out everything.'

'You said it was an unpleasant letter, and I don't know anyone else who would be likely to write you unpleasant letters,' said Winefride wonderingly. 'Besides, Michael says he saw her in London.'

The sisters exchanged glances. 'You see,' said Mrs. Loveden, under her breath.

'Did he say where?'

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'At the Savoy restaurant'; with a smile and a blush she drew the manifold letter from her pocket, and read an extract.

'You see, he makes no mystery of it whatever,' said Mrs. Loveden, triumphantly.

'Why should he make mysteries? He has no secrets from me,' said Winefride, holding her head very high. 'Mrs. Kelson has no business to write unkindly of Michael. I don't even wish to hear what she said. She must be a wicked woman.'

Lady Gryffydd hung her head as her daughter left the room, and Mrs. Loveden said no more; nor did Winefride reopen the subject to her mother and aunt; but that night she wrote to her sister and confidante.

'Oh, my darling Thekla, rejoice with me, for *he* is nearer to us than he has ever been before, and I believe that our Lord will answer our prayers. You know, I offered my earthly happiness, all my hopes, my very life, if He willed, for this great gift of grace to be given to my darling. Perhaps God does not require this sacrifice. . . .

'The more I think of him, the more I feel that a soul so noble, so delicately thoughtful for the feelings of others, so generous and affectionate and careless of self, must be specially dear to our Lord, and that He will listen to the prayers which have been offered all over the world for Michael, and grant him that Faith which he himself desires so earnestly to possess. Oh, my darling Thekla, I think of him at Fort Aloysius listening to the good counsels of the holy monks, who are so much better able to help him than I could ever be, and I am so happy over his dear letters that I could cry for joy.

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'Mrs. Kelson has written unkindly of Michael to Mamma, simply because he showed kindness to a poor woman she does not like, but who is an old friend of his: a lady in great trouble, with a husband who *drinks!* He took her out to dine and to a theatre. Could any but an evil mind find harm in such a simple action? For a moment I was wickedly filled with such anger against her that I could not speak; but of course I have got over it, and prayed for forgiveness; for how can she know what Michael is? He does not show his real nature to everyone. He cares naturally only for what is good, but his very kindnesses are misunderstood because he is so careless of what people think. But that I should let a little thing like a spiteful letter trouble me when I have this great happiness of his love, and this great anxiety filling my mind! I count the days to your coming home, my darling, and seeing Michael at last. He is so *much* better-looking than the photograph I sent you! I know you will love him at first sight; he has such an attractive face. But when you know him, it will be his nature that will attract you even more than his looks. Go on praying, darling Thekla, for your brother-to-be, but I know you will; it is the only wish I have in the world now, that he may receive the gift of Grace. . . .'

CHAPTER XVII

'SWEETHEART,' wrote Michael, after giving the particulars of his doings in London which Winefride had read aloud to her mother and aunt, 'you will want to hear all I can tell you of Fort Aloysius. I

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arrived yesterday afternoon, having come from Edinburgh *viâ* Perth and Inverness, and by great good luck travelled with an acquaintance whom I have always liked, and who now bids fair to become a friend of mine — one Alaric Tremaine; a giant hailing from the borders of Devon and Somerset; a splendid fellow — burnt an even brown, with eyes startling in their blueness, and bronze hair thick upon his massive head. He is thirty-seven years old — scarce ten years my senior, and has already seen nearly twenty years' service in the East; though he is such a magnificent specimen of a man that it is clear the tropics have done him no harm. I needn't tell you what an idle, useless beggar I feel beside him. He has come to Fort Aloysius to see his young brother Cuthbert, who is a novice here. I hadn't any idea that he was a Catholic. . . . The run down the Caledonian Canal in the little steamer was delightful — heather-covered hills, with the canal threading its way at their base; clumps of wood, and now and then a small village, but for the most part no sign of man or beast. The Canal opened into a sort of lake about a couple of miles above the monastery, and as we turned into this the Abbey burst upon our view — a monument of cold grey stone against the green of the hill-side.

'A lay brother had been sent to meet us and take charge of our luggage; and when this had been placed in a small cart we set off on foot; he leading his shaggy pony, and Tremaine and I walking by his side.

'The lay brother was just a rough peasant lad, with a bright and honest face. He answered our questions civilly, but volunteered no remarks on his own account.

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'The guest-master, Father Petroc's brother, greeted us with a smile so like his that I could have laughed.

'He was very polite to me, but to Tremaine effusive; beaming upon him with an affectionate admiration that pleased me.

'"A very great man, you know — a very great man," he said; "one of our Empire-builders. We are all very proud to welcome him here." Tremaine seemed quite at home, and remained in the parlour to greet his brother, who had been sent for; but I was ill at ease.

'I was taken upstairs to a small, very clean bedroom, which he told me was reserved for me as long as I chose to occupy it.

'It contained a truckle-bed, over which a crucifix was nailed to a lime-washed wall; a chest of drawers which served also as a dressing-table; two chairs and a washstand.

'"You'll be ready for your supper," he said, smiling. "It will be served in the refectory."

'"But how shall I find my way?"

'"I'll come and fetch you. You won't be long? We don't dress for dinner here." This small jest served as an excuse for another hearty laugh.

'He did not give me much law, and I had barely time to wash and change before he returned.

'He led the way down the stairs, and along a passage which turned into a wide cloister running round an open space of grass.

'I observed that the guest-house was only an *annexe* to the great monastery.

'We passed through a lobby and thence into a lofty room, with an arched oaked ceiling, and ecclesi-

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astical-looking windows set high in the walls, and with long tables flanking its sides.

'A single table stood on a daïs at the end of the room. Behind this was a high-backed carven chair; but the other tables had only wooden forms placed between them and the wall, by way of sitting accommodation. I was shown my place at the extreme end of one of these forms, and found myself next to Tremaine.

'The distant sound of low chanting attracted my attention. It grew momentarily louder, and presently a long procession of monks, with their cowls drawn and their hands hidden in their full sleeves, and crossed before them, began to file into the refectory, walking two and two. They broke off to right and left, and took their stand between the forms and the table, with their backs to the wall.

'The abbot, a portly old monk distinguished from his fellows by the heavy gold chain with its dependent cross which was hung about his neck, brought up the rear, and marched to the table reserved for him on the daïs. At a sign from him a Latin grace was chanted.

'After bowing to the abbot, all save half a dozen monks seated themselves. The six were told off for the day to wait upon their fellows. One other mounted a pulpit between the daïs and the right-hand table, and at a sign from the abbot began to read aloud.

'He read the life of some saint in a high-pitched, expressionless voice, and the only other sound in the room was the chink of crockery, besides the soft footfall of the monks who waited at table.

'The meal consisted of soup, a joint of boiled

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mutton, vegetables, and a hunk of bread. A large jug of ale was placed before Tremaine and myself, but for the rest only water was served.

'The monks drew back their cowls as soon as they were seated, and I then had an opportunity of observing their faces.

'I hadn't much difficulty in recognising the younger Tremaine — one of the nicest-looking boys I ever saw. A great hulking fellow like his brother, with the same extraordinary blue eyes. An athlete by training, as was obvious — an honest, open, laughing countenance. I couldn't help saying to myself, What a shame for a splendid fellow like that to be cooped up here! But this will vex you, my darling! Consider it unwritten.

'Young Cuthbert Tremaine's name in religion is Brother David, which suits him well, for he is certainly "ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look upon." The only prize I won at my dame-school was for Scripture history, beloved, and it interested me greatly, but I observe that you never recognise my quotations from the Old Testament.

'Next to Brother David was a sallow sour-visaged youth called Brother Canice, with thin lips that spoke of temper suppressed, and red-rimmed eyes, and a rather timid, brow-beaten look. But the novice that interested me most was one rejoicing in the strange name of Brother Emidius.

'Quite young, with a face almost transparent in its whiteness, and sunken clear blue eyes beneath a great overhanging brow: the only face among the novices that bore the outward impression of an intense spiritual nature.

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'Among the professed monks, there was of course every variety of expression upon faces intellectual, faces animal, faces simple, faces ascetic; but this in common honesty must I write you, my Winefride — that the bitterest sceptic, the most impatient critic who ever held a man's life wasted that was given to this thraldom — could not deny that the predominant expression in all that variety of the human countenance was that of peace.

'A peace that could not fairly be called apathetic, nor anything approaching it. Rather the look of men freed for ever from the wearing fret of doubt or indecision; a kind of serene lightheartedness.

'The peace of those who have, so far as this world is concerned, doffed their individual responsibilities and ambitions for ever; and thus entered, as it were, prematurely into rest.

'Rest of the spirit — for the body or the mind must be actively exercised to ensure that the restlessness of the spirit be not aroused. So much even an outsider like myself can perceive. . . .

'At the end of the meal the abbot struck a bell, and the monks at once rose to their feet. The reader closed his book and descended from the pulpit. A Latin grace was sung, and then, re-forming into a procession, two by two the monks filed out of the refectory in the direction of the chapel. Those who had served at table and the young monk who had read to us remained behind to eat their supper.

'Alaric Tremaine and I returned to the guest-house, and he asked me to join in a stroll and smoke a cigarette in the pleasant evening air. We talked a little, but not much. I think the trend of our talk is conveyed more or less by my reflections as recorded

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above. From the church close at hand came the sound of the monks intoning their office.

'At half-past nine the guest-house closed for the night.

'I wasn't called next morning, and when I passed the open door of Tremaine's room, which was next my own, I saw that it was empty.

'The church bells had been ringing all the time I was dressing, and for aught I knew, long before I was awake.

'It was about half-past seven when I made my way into the chapel, and Mass was being said at the high altar, and in several of the side chapels.

'I joined Alaric Tremaine, and we went to the refectory together for breakfast at eight; and on the way he told me that he had been up at half-past four. "The dawn wakes me." So he has evidently not lived in the East for so many years for nothing. He looked surprisingly fresh, and without ado profited by the hospitality of the convent, and finished the dish of eggs and bacon set before us; some foolishness made me loth to touch it, for only bread and tea was served to the monks during the meal, of which the manner was that of the preceding evening.

'After breakfast Tremaine went off with his brother for a walk and a talk, and I rather envied him. The young monk was beaming with a pride and delight in his distinguished elder that was, to an onlooker, rather touching. I could see that Alaric was moved by it in spite of his rough pretence of chaffing indifference.

'They went off together as happily as two school-

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boy friends; Brother David doing the honours of the place eagerly, and Alaric nodding and listening with no lack of interest on his strong sensitive face. The guest-master sought me out and talked of Father Petroc, and I began to think I was the only person in the world who knew not the meaning of brotherly love, and realised what a grudge an only child may owe its parents.

'All this time no instruction! for which the community deserves and receives my gratitude. The retreat is not yet — not until Father Petroc arrives.

'At present only peace, as I have said. The strange peace which, pervading the whole atmosphere of Fort Aloysius, sheds also a portion of its balm upon the worldling within its gates.

'How curiously far away seems London from the cold pure stillness of this refuge among the hills of the north! London and its absurdly overloaded dinner-tables, and the antics of the players in the vitiated air of the theatre which I found pleasant enough but a day or two ago. But a few hours since indeed it appeared to me almost essential that I should read the news of the day as fast as it could be telegraphed or printed; and now, behold, a change of surroundings, and the outside world seems to regard me not at all, and to be not at all regarded by me.

'Tremaine attended High Mass at ten, and as he seemed to expect me to go with him, I went. All the monks were present in their stalls, chanting in Latin during the whole ceremony.

'After Mass, the two brothers invited me so warmly to join them that I could not refuse; though I thought of the long, long time that must elapse

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before they could meet again, and hesitated to interrupt them.

'"We've told each other all our news," said Brother David, frankly. . . .

'When lunch, or as they prefer to call it, dinner, was over, we filed off with the monks and followed them as they moved chanting along the cloisters, till we reached a large bare apartment where a number of chairs were set in the middle of the floor in a horseshoe shape. The novices were excluded, but the abbot seated himself at the apex of the horseshoe, and the monks took their places in their appointed chairs; they only spoke when addressed by the abbot, or when he had signed to them his permission.

'I guessed that he was more indulgent than usual in consideration of the circumstances, from the number of questions addressed to Tremaine concerning his life in the East, and especially of the earlier years, which he had passed almost exclusively among natives. He described his adventures with great vividness and picturesqueness and humour, and their delight and interest and wonder was once more — I can find no other word — touching in its spontaneity and simplicity. They were especially aghast over the "hardships" he had obviously undergone, taking not into account any glamour of adventure, or danger or freedom which made such hardships seem as nought in the recollection.

'"Think of what these poor fellows eat and drink — of the beds they sleep on — the discipline — the dead monotony," said Tremaine to me afterwards. "Good Lord! And to think my life in the jungle horrified them!"

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'But we agreed that the naïve expressions of surprise and enjoyment which, through Brother David and the guest-master, reached our ears, suggested that this "recreation" must have been exceptionally lively, and Tremaine said he had heard that this half-hour of ordered enjoyment is usually abhorred by its victims.

'After Benediction, as a series of sermons for men is being preached by one of the monks, I stayed to listen, but Tremaine escaped; and when I went up to my little room I saw him once more wandering with his brother in the grounds, smoking his eternal pipe.

'He is going to-morrow and I expect I shall miss him. His is a unique personality. Strong and energetic beyond the average, with a vitality I have never seen equalled. The intensity of enjoyment with which he talks, or listens to anything that interests him; the diversity of his interests; literature, nature, history, psychology, politics, sport, theology — nothing comes amiss to his omnivorous mind; he appears to me equally absorbed, whether he is engaged in reading, talking, saying his prayers, taking photographs, or eating his meals with an appetite I never saw excelled. The quality most striking about him is his abnormal quality of concentration. I am minded to take our honeymoon trip to his residency at Banat, for the mere pleasure of pursuing this acquaintance, which has to-night, as we walked and smoked after supper, advanced across the border and touched friendship.

'There is some quality in him of enthusiasm which has outlived all the chances and changes and doubtless the disappointments of his seven-and-thirty

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years. Yet he must have learnt early all that isolation and responsibility can teach. But dear old Bernard himself is not more simple at heart than this man, with all his experience and ripe wisdom.

'I wish he were not going away to-morrow, but he said frankly that he couldn't bear the parting from his wife any longer. He showed me her miniature on his dressing-table with all the pride of a lover. Yet they have been married ten years.

'"That's Kit," he said, and did not attempt to hide his delight when I exclaimed with truth that I had never seen a more charming face.

'It was that of a young girl, with bright wistful eyes, and curly dark hair, and a rather timid smile.

'"It was taken just after we married, when she was one-and-twenty. But she hasn't changed a bit," he said simply; and something told me that in the faithful eyes of that large and loyal soul, she would never change. . . .

'Oh, my little love — why didn't you choose a lover more worthy of you than a useless, loafing, aimless lounger in the ways of life? When I meet a man cast in the heroic mould of a fellow like Tremaine, do you think I can't see the difference? — ay, and feel it bitterly. I look on at us both, as it were, from the outside — and compare us.

'But you have chosen me, and I love you; and if I dared, I would comfort you by saying that your wish has never been nearer its fulfilment than now; for a chance word from this man's mouth has moved me more than all the arguments. He has upon me an extraordinarily inspiring and vivifying effect, so that it is my *disillusions* which seem to vanish in his presence . . . but to-morrow when he is gone,

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I may be in another mood; I know myself. Don't count on anything. . . . We have not touched on the subject of religion until to-night, when the semi-darkness and the growing attraction, which, I may frankly say, exists between us, induced an exchange of confidences.

'I asked him, diffidently, whether he were happy about his brother; and he said, with emphasis and that decision which arises from a habit of clear thought and purpose:

'"Absolutely. His faith is strong, and free from any manner of doubt."

'"One would say from his face that he had such freshness and vitality; such exuberance of spirits, and unbounded capacity for enjoyment."

'"Yes. That's why he distrusts himself. He distrusts himself to a quite extraordinary extent. He believes his will-power to be infinitely weaker than his passions, and has therefore deliberately put himself into harness to be driven by a stronger will than his own. He has thrown himself into this life with his characteristic ardour."

'"His content is obvious."

'"It's more than content. It's happiness," said Tremaine. "I never saw the old fellow so thoroughly happy."

'"You could not have chosen such a life for yourself?"

'He agreed heartily.

'"It's not at all in my line."

'I only ventured on one more word, and indeed we had no more time, for the clock was chiming in readiness to strike the half-hour after nine which sends us all meekly to our respective rooms.

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'"Then do you think that a man, conscious of many human weaknesses and a weak will, of a mental capacity by no means above the average, and with no claim to the possession of any spiritual perception of his own, would be justified in submitting his judgment blindly to the guidance of those whose lives are purer, whose wills are stronger, and whose perceptions are clearer than his own; that he may accept their faith and be guided by it, even though he does not understand, nor even share that faith?"

'He paused.

'"I think," he said slowly, "that as a sick man, consulting a doctor, takes his advice as a rule, blindly; so such a man as you describe may accept the teaching of the combined wisdom of his betters, as likely to be superior to any theory he could evolve for himself. Our people, you know, think it as absurd for each individual to think out his religion for himself, as it would be for a layman to instruct a physician — or any other expert. The Church claims to be an expert on a certain subject, to put it baldly."

'"And if one accepts the teaching of that Church — and just does the minimum she asks — is that sufficient?"

'He turned on me with a curious light in his blue eyes.

'"You won't find yourself doing that. It is everything — or nothing," he said.

'We bade each other good-night, and I came to my little room here, not to sleep, but to write to you, my darling. . . . How little of a man — what a poor moth you must think me — hovering, hover-

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ing, never settling. Or let us go back to the hermit's old simile, the chameleon reflecting, truly perhaps for the moment, the colour of his surroundings ——'

CHAPTER XVIII

THE slow train from the junction stopped at every small station on the single line to Aberfraw, and Michael looked from the window of the compartment which he occupied alone, on to their trim borders, gay with hollyhocks and dahlias of every hue, and sunflowers nodding to the late August sunshine.

He watched impatiently the little crowds on the narrow platforms: labouring men, shawled women with baskets, rosy, pinafored children, tourists with puggarees and cameras and knapsacks, well-to-do farmers nodding and calling to each other; slouching country porters, apple-cheeked and shock-headed, wheeling and shouldering corded tin boxes.

The train ran through wooded passes, following the curves of a brawling river tumbling over grey stones, and widening ever as it approached the valley for which Michael was bound.

Presently it flowed broadly and calmly between grass banks whereon lay scattered the cottage dwellings of Aberfraw village, and its church. The corn-sheaves stood upon the fields below the woods, and they too caught the gold of the afternoon sunshine which lay upon the foliage, and glistened on the brown water, and lighted the ramparts and turrets of the Castle, which rose above the forest trees surrounding it upon the mountain-side.

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Michael's handsome face showed no signs of the fever of impatience which had at times consumed him during his weeks of sojourn at Fort Aloysius, for these moods of rebellion had alternated with peace of mind and content, and a dreamy pleasure in the beauty and restfulness of his surroundings, and even in the very monotony of monastic life. Now, though his brown eyes were anxious, they held something also of the relief of decision.

Michael was indolent, but not lacking in moral courage. After long dallying, he brought himself, with a sigh, to recognise the fact that though his imagination was touched, his sympathy roused, his admiration excited, by the great organisation whereof for him the mysteries had been partially unveiled, and whose precepts he had set himself to learn with the docility of a child — he could yet not look into the face of his teacher, who was also, as he admitted frankly enough, his intellectual and moral superior, and say the simple words, *I believe*. The gift of faith, which little Winefride had implored for him, had not been vouchsafed; and this he told his friends in the Community with regret unfeigned but no hesitation.

They were very kind, very patient, and not at all reproachful. His unconscious charm of manner and simplicity of heart had endeared him to the brethren. They told him sorrowfully that they would not cease to pray, and more than one of the older monks smiled and uttered words not new to him.

'It will come one day.'

'I shall pray for you always,' said the young novice, Brother David, when Michael bade him

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farewell, wondering whether he would ever look again upon that ruddy, cheerful countenance.

He wondered with a greater sadness, as he looked upon the wasted face and large clear eyes of Brother Emidius, for the seal of death was too plainly stamped upon the great white forehead with its blue-veined temples. Michael's soft heart was wrung by the disappointment he had inflicted upon this novice, who had evinced a passionate interest in his soul's welfare, and who attracted him strangely by his obvious sincerity and innocence of character.

Brother Emidius was a child of the monastery, knowing less than nothing of the world which had handed him over, as a destitute little boy, to the charity of the faithful.

The tenderness Michael felt for the young monk was something akin to the reverence wherewith he regarded his betrothed. In the narrow world of the monastery he found his own outlook widening curiously. He had never been a scoffer; but there were phases of life which had meant no more to him than they would have meant to any other healthy young worldling of his kind. The word *ascetic* called to his mind the image of a being not far removed from lunacy, who neglected the actual needs of the body for the imaginary welfare of the soul. *La vie mystique* was an expression conveying a vague impression of charlatanism or hysteria. The word holiness, especially when used in describing a young man, suggested a mixture of hypocrisy, priggishness and cant, which it was unpleasant to contemplate; and the saints were more or less conscious imposters who played upon the credulity of the ignorant, and flourished chiefly in the Middle Ages.

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Michael had never paid much attention to these vague definitions which none the less existed in his mind, but he was aware that they had changed as insensibly as they had formed; and that he no more doubted the holiness and sincerity of Brother Emidius than he doubted the innocence and truth of Winefride.

His spiritual perceptions might be, as he averred, defective, but they were sensitive enough to render him acutely conscious, in the presence of certain human beings, of an unmistakable emanation of good — or evil; and this sense, which is developed in some natures as certainly as it is lacking altogether in others, had never played him false, though he had often neglected its warnings. It now made him acutely aware of his own unworthiness in the presence of Brother Emidius, and even, in a much lesser degree, in that of Brother David, whose candour and single-minded earnestness and honesty of purpose were apparent, though he was less spiritual in spite of his sturdy faith, and had far more of human weakness than his brother in religion.

All knew Brother Emidius to be standing so close to the threshold of another world, that there was something of the sadness of farewell in every glance that was cast upon him as he moved faithfully about his duties.

'When I am gone,' he said cheerfully to Michael, 'our Lord may see fit to answer the prayers which the religious are offering for you.'

'If your prayers are not answered —' began Michael, resentfully.

'It would be that I am not worthy of so much joy,' said Brother Emidius, interrupting. 'I have

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set my heart on this thing, and I think there is too much of human affection in my desire for the salvation of your soul.'

Good prosaic Father Joseph had uttered this same sentiment to Michael at Bronville, and it had sounded so purely fantastic in the young man's ears that he had been minded to laugh aloud. But looking into the face of the boy who was dying upon his feet, he felt no temptation to merriment. On the contrary, his pity and affection, his consciousness of his own helplessness, were so intense, that he relieved his feelings by a burst of mingled impatience and irritation.

'I wish you wouldn't bother about me. I've told you a hundred times that I'm not worth it.'

Brother Emidius uttered no word, but he looked at Michael with a smile tender as that of a grown man who regards the petulance of a little child.

'Don't you see,' said Michael, 'that in standing out against doing what attracts me secretly, and would give happiness to the one I love best, I've done the most real and sincere thing I've ever done in my life? I've clung to the virtue I care most for in the world — honesty.'

'We know it,' said Brother Emidius, nodding. 'It is plain that God does not mean it to come this way,' he added thoughtfully.

'It will never come any way,' said Michael, with a short impatient laugh. 'It would need a miracle to make me believe.'

'Then the miracle will be wrought,' said Brother Emidius gently.

His words of patient faith and hope rang in

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Michael's ears as he departed, and filled him with an infinite sadness.

'I might have held a little candle to the devil, and made his last days happy, and saved my darling this blow from the hand she loves best in the world, God bless her,' he thought. 'And yet — I wonder why — I can't. What prevents me? It is not as though I have ever been characterised by such extraordinary sincerity. My point of view is always shifting. My mind is like a kaleidoscope. I am apt to say instinctively what pleases my hearers most; more, I sometimes realise with shame that I can almost make myself *feel* what pleases them most — for the moment. Yet in the very certainty that I am for once wholly sincere I find a peace of mind, a restfulness, that I have never before known. Perhaps it is the consciousness of having worked at something in earnest for the first time in my life — of having spent a portion of my time in pursuing a definite aim, that affords me this glow of self-approval. Or is it the relief of finding myself freed from — prison, from the uncongenial task of introspection and meditation, which makes my spirits so strangely light, and ready for the battle with my darling's prejudices which I have now to face, and for which, after all, I have lacked courage to prepare her.'

For Winefride's letters had been so joyous, so grateful, so full of childish faith and faithful love, that he had not had the heart to tell her that his own prediction had been fulfilled, and that the inevitable reaction had set in, and shown him the interior of Fort Aloysius in a dull grey light, entirely devoid of any glow of enthusiastic feeling.

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He had written what he thought she would like to read, of his daily life, sent sketches of the brethren, verses that had occurred to him in the church, in the grounds, after Benediction, etc., and had been silent concerning the ups and downs of his own state of mind. Winefride had accepted his reserves, as she accepted his outpourings, with love unquestioning.

Michael could not help knowing, though he dwelt upon the knowledge rather with humility than with pride, that she loved him deeply and increasingly, and upon this conviction he based his present certainty of being able, in the end, to overcome her scruples, when she had to face the alternative of parting from him finally.

He believed sincerely that she could not live without him, as he knew that he now could not endure the thought of life without her. With the lightheartedness of youth and health and newly-recovered freedom, he looked forward with confidence to the struggle before him, bracing himself not unwillingly to the task of subduing her, and carrying her off in triumph.

'I am not asking her to give up her religion, after all,' he argued. 'I will go to mass with her whenever she wishes. Our children shall be brought up Catholics. She shall build a church: do what she will. Before, I had no ground to stand upon, but now, when I have sacrificed my summer in the sincere effort to become what she would have me become, I can take the thing seriously; and I will conquer them all, or if not, at least I will conquer her,' he said to himself; and as the train drew up at the little lonely platform of Aberfraw he sprang down, full of energy and confidence.

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His servant, who had joined him in London with his luggage, came in dismay to say that there was no trap — no carriage.

'I am taking them by surprise,' Michael interrupted. 'You can get a trap from the inn and bring up my things. I shall walk up the short way. You'll be in plenty of time. It's only just after seven.'

'Very good, sir.'

Michael gave up his ticket to the country porter, and started off on foot. Along the high road for a few yards, and then through a turnstile in the hedge into a short cut through the woods, steep and sharp, winding upwards across the thickly forested hill.

He met not a soul, for the pathway was a private one, and so much overgrown since he and Winifride had strolled there in the early summer that the brambles impeded his progress.

There had been a good deal of rain, and he had to leap over many a swollen stream rushing down the hill to join the broad river in the valley, and to make his way through much wet and tangled overgrowth of grass and fern, so that when he emerged at length into the Castle grounds, he looked down rather ruefully upon his scratched boots and splashed clothes, before presenting himself at the front door, which usually stood wide open, but which he now perceived, with some surprise, to be shut.

He sought and pulled the iron ring half concealed by the ivy, and awaited the answer, and probably — as he remarked to himself — the reproof of the Irish butler, who uttered his thoughts freely in and out of season.

But though the old man opened the door, he

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showed no astonishment at beholding Mr. Ferrys, but on the contrary said, as though he had been eagerly expecting Michael, 'Here ye are at last. Sir Bernard was saying ye couldn't be here till to-morrow, but I said "He'll take a special somewhere."'

His voice was so subdued, the twinkle in his eye so entirely quenched, that Michael was startled.

'Why, Barney —' he said, and felt a sudden muffled beat of his heart — a faint premonition which leaped to quick alarm as Barney's face and voice changed.

'Lord have mercy, but he doesn't know! Didn't your honour get the telegram then? Come into the smoking-room, sir, for the love of heaven. Sir Bernard's in there.'

As he spoke, a door in the front hall opened, and Bernard uttered a call, in the same subdued tone that Barney had used in his first greeting. Michael went quickly to him and took the outstretched hands in an agony of dumb questioning. Bernard drew him into the smoking-room and shut the door.

'Pull yourself together, and tell me as plainly and quickly as you can — what has happened to Winefride?' said Michael.

It was he who was calm, and Bernard who was sobbing boyishly, like the boy he was. Pale, exhausted, and with eyes sunken with wakefulness and tears, he obeyed.

'The day before yesterday she went off to get wild flowers as usual — and she didn't come back. We weren't frightened till — till the afternoon, and then my mother got into a panic and we went to

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look for her — and we couldn't find her.' His voice broke, but Michael's compelling look forced him to resume his self-control.

'We thought she had found somebody ill in a distant cottage, and stayed to help, and sent us a message by some child who hadn't delivered it. That is what I told my mother, but she wouldn't listen. I don't know who spoke of — of the river first. In the village they went there at once. You know there have been many accidents in the Gwy. Some of us were searching all night — and in the morning some boys — found her. . . . She must have gone down to gather the flowering water-weeds — they are pretty and she was fond of them — her little hands were full of them still. The banks were all loosened by the rain, and the earth slipped and she must have lost her balance — she lay at the bottom of a deep salmon pool — of course there wasn't any hope. She had been dead nearly twenty-four hours when they found her. They sent up to tell us, and before I had time to take in the horror — to realise anything, I thought of you and telegraphed. I hardly know what I telegraphed.'

'I missed the telegram. I was coming of my own accord,' said Michael, in a voice so calm that the sound of it surprised himself.

He wondered whether he were really incapable of emotion; or whether, like Bernard, he had not had time to realise the horror.

Bernard was speaking again, sobbing in broken whispers.

'The inquest — early this morning — thank God it's over, before you came. It's all peace now —

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our little angel is at rest — all covered up in her coffin, — Oh, Winefride!'

He uttered his sister's name in such an anguish of boyish sorrow, and so pitifully, that Michael felt a sudden spasm of answering emotion; but it was pity for Bernard and not for himself that moved him.

'Don't think I've been like this — unnerved and all that — all the time,' said the boy, piteously. 'There's been nobody but me. I've had to do everything. I didn't break down till — till I saw your face and saw you didn't know, and thought of having to tell you. It's the telling — I've said it all so badly — but you understand ——'

'I understand that —' Michael broke off; he could not put the fact he had learned into words. He saw Bernard's blue eyes looking into his face, with anxiety and wonder mingled. His own eyes were quite dry and bright.

'I understand — but you see, I can't realise it,' he said, gently. 'I shall get it into my mind presently, I suppose.

'I know you're as brave as — as — but I'm not. I have been up to now, but seeing you —' said Bernard, and he walked to the window and stood there looking out blindly, restraining himself from further tears, ashamed by his friend's calm.

Michael, sitting by the table, watched him, and pity still played idly about the surface of his mind. Poor boy! He was unstrung, unnerved — no wonder. He tried to awaken his own feelings and only succeeded in realising that he had none.

He found himself thinking, Now I shan't have to tell her anything. There won't be any need; and a

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strange, far-away relief touched him, though all the while he knew vaguely that something had happened which made the relief of no account.

Bernard came and stood beside him, looking down at him anxiously and humbly, with the dejection and bewilderment of a heart-breaking sorrow. And Michael roused himself and tried to consider what would be expected of him.

'I shall realise — when I see her,' he found himself muttering.

'Didn't you understand?' Bernard hesitated, and shuddered, and then said pleadingly, 'The — the coffin's closed. Oh, Michael! She — she wouldn't have wished it. She'd have wanted you to remember her as she was. Don't you know — the river — a day and a night out there — poor, poor little darling,' he broke down and sobbed uncontrollably. 'Oh, be glad you didn't see her. Don't you know that ——'

Michael stopped him with a stifled sound expressive of understanding; but the fact that he was never to look upon Winefride's face again suddenly pierced the thick cloud of his strange stupor with a dart of poignant agony.

The thought of her death had not touched him as the thought that her bodily loveliness was already a thing of the past touched him, — with a sudden, wild resentment and horror that almost blinded him.

'Come to her room — we take it in turns to watch there day and night. To-morrow — she will be taken to the chapel,' whispered Bernard.

He rose, stumbling, to his feet, and Bernard asked him hurriedly if he felt all right — if he would have

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some brandy. Michael heard, but did not see him; the world was lost in mist for the space of ten seconds; then he said, roughly:

'I'm all right.'

The silence of the house reminded him of something; what was it? Oh yes, the silence of the house at Clode, when its master lay dead. Strange that it should be the same — the same — atmosphere was the word that occurred to him. Was it really the atmosphere, or only the state of mind? He walked steadily across the great draughty, lofty hall of the castle, behind its young owner, who led the way up the winding stone stair of the turret in which Winefride slept.

Winefride slept! Michael thought of the evening, a few months earlier, when he had seen her stepping down the stairs, shading the candle with her little transparent hand, and casting the light upwards to illumine the halo of fair hair about her sweet face; but the thought brought no sorrow — he realised only the strangeness.

At the top of the stair Bernard opened a door in a low archway, and Michael bent his head and passed beneath the arch, and entered the maiden chamber of his betrothed wife.

With his accustomed quickness he took in every detail of the bare and simple room. The narrow white bed, with a black crucifix at the head, and a little stoup of holy water hung below it. The plain furniture, the square of threadbare carpet in the centre of the white, boarded floor, whereon trestles draped with white supported a coffin of light oak, with tall candles burning around it, and flowers heaped upon its closed lid.

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There were two or three prie-dieux; before one a nun knelt motionless; before another was Mrs. Loveden, her head bent over her rosary.

She lifted her large pale face and eyes reddened with weeping, and saw Michael, and rose instantly, making a sign to the nun, who rose also; they went out together followed by Bernard.

Michael stood with folded arms beside the coffin, looking down upon it.

He realised now that beneath the flowers his little love lay sleeping; that her innocent lips would move no more in prayer for him; that he had no longer the power to bring tears to the blue eyes closed in eternal slumber.

Her soul had slipped out of his grasp — away — upwards.

The room mocked him with its stillness; for the silence held a mighty force before which he stood helpless, powerless, impotent in his almost incredulous wrath and grief and disappointment.

For slowly these three emotions grew upon him, and mastered him, and shook his being with dumb, furious intensity.

The veins in his forehead swelled, and the beat in his own temples became audible to him, as he stood there motionless, in the candle-light, which slowly gathered brightness as the light of day — the red bars of the sunset — faded in the western sky behind the spires of the larches on the hill-tops.

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CHAPTER XIX

WINEFRIDE'S mother sat in the library, which was lighted only by the feeble burning of a single oil lamp.

Her pale blue eyes were sunken and reddened with the shedding of many tears, but there was also a strange peace on her waxen face.

Beside her Mrs. Loveden was seated, on a lower chair, but her faced showed signs of far more agitation and a livelier sorrow.

'Poor boy — poor, poor young fellow!' she said, and the plump, carefully-tended hand that held her sister's soft fingers trembled violently. 'Mary Theresa, I cannot get his look out of my mind — a kind of fixed look of white, unbelieving despair. I don't think he saw me; I mean, not to take any notice. He just went straight to our darling's coffin and stood there. . . . Bernard came outside with Sister Mary Magdalene and me, and we waited for a time, and then I made Bernard go back to him. I was frightened; and a minute later *he* came out, and Bernard followed and took him to his room, and said he asked that no one should be allowed to disturb him. He would not have any food — nothing — after his journey, and Bernard thought it best to let him go his own way.'

'I am sorry for him,' said Lady Gryffydd, in submissive tones. 'But God knew he wasn't good enough for my darling, and He took her away.'

Tears rolled down the mother's face, but her sister, who knew her, was aware that they were tears

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rather of humble resignation than of the restless sorrow which possessed her own soul.

'Oh, Mary Theresa, that you can be so calm! Your own child! And the pity of it — so young — so lovely, and so dear,' she sobbed. 'I thought I was calmer myself to-day, but the sight of that poor young man's terrible grief brought back to me all our hope in her — and her happiness, and her bright pretty face ——'

Lady Gryffydd's lips twitched, but she wept no more.

'I shall go to her soon — in such a few years,' she said patiently. 'I used to fret a little over growing old, but now I am very glad. And she is safe with her father. You don't know, Lucy Agnes, what a strange blessed relief to me is that thought. She was his favourite child. He made no outward difference, but I knew it. Perhaps his prayers have saved her from sorrow. My darling. I always knew I was not fit to take care of them alone, and Michael's influence over her was growing stronger, and you know he has not always been a very good man. I would not judge him. God knows I do not mean to be hard on anyone; but when I think of my innocent Winefride — I was afraid. But now, though I mourn for my child, yet it is peace too. To know her safe for ever from this world, and all its temptations. For Lucy, I am her mother and I *know* she had changed. She was becoming absorbed in her love for Michael. I know, too, how attractive he is. I have felt it in spite of my prejudice against him; and Joseph felt it, and you most of all.' She looked with mild reproach at Mrs. Loveden, and Mrs. Loveden hung her head. 'And I

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feared, I feared always, that some day — she would yield, and marry him whether he became a Catholic or not.'

'No, no,' cried Mrs. Loveden; but Lady Gryffydd, shaking her head, reiterated her conviction firmly.

'That is what I feared — that some day she would weaken — she would be touched by his perseverance, and perhaps, in the end, have come to think that it might be easier to convert him if she were with him always. And God saw that she was being tried beyond her strength — and took her away — that is my belief,' she ended simply.

'Perhaps you are right, though I feel differently. But it is very hard for you,' sobbed Mrs. Loveden, 'very hard upon us all. But you set me an example — that you can submit thus to God's will even in the midst of your sorrow; even give thanks that she has been taken in her innocence — going as it were straight from the altar, where she knelt beside you that morning, to her death. It is happy that your faith can comfort you, and that you have your other children. Thekla is so like her, and has grown up so much more like even than she used to be. I start when she comes into the room now.'

'I shall not have her very long.'

'But you would not keep her back?'

'God forbid,' said Lady Gryffydd. There was an exhausted sound in her tired voice, which touched her sister.

'I wish you would go and lie down and rest a little, and let me read to you. I might read you to sleep at last.'

'I rest here, and I could not pay attention to reading. Let me be, dearest. I shall go back and

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watch by my darling again, presently. I feel more at peace there than anywhere except in the chapel — and there is only one more day ——'

Michael had passed a *nuit blanche*, and as his open window showed the first glimmer of the dawn, he had risen and dressed himself, noiselessly, for he knew that Bernard's room was next to his own.

As he ended, the clock struck half-past four, and he stood at the window, looking out upon the slowly brightening sky, and the reddening of the east with the coming glory.

As he watched, the sun rose over mountains flushed with heather and gilded with gorse; it shone upon the little, grey stone farmhouses with the blue, slated roofs on the mountain-side; and on the river that brawled over the rocks and boulders, and flowed silently above the deep pools. . . .

He shuddered as he turned to leave the room; leaving also, as it were, behind him, the horrors of the long, long night; the crowded images that had haunted his sleepless brain.

He said to himself that he would go away — back to London — anywhere. That he could not stay there. He could not bear it.

His steps did not turn towards the turret-room where Winefride lay sleeping, watched by loving eyes — but downwards to the chapel, where she had knelt beside him on the eve of their last parting. He was conscious of a vague fancy that there he would be nearer to her than he could be anywhere else in the world.

Besides, he would be alone for a long while. They would not say Mass before seven. Bernard

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had told him this on the previous evening, and he had noted the fact sub-consciously.

The chapel was empty, as he had hoped, and the light of the morning glory stole through the small, heavily-leaded windows, and met the red glow of the lamp in the sanctuary.

He found a dark-corner under the tribune, and took his place there, beside the font, and folded his arms in his favourite attitude, leaning back and closing his eyes with a sense of peace.

The fierce emotion which had possessed him through the hours of darkness — the sense of the mockery of fate — of the futility alike of his honest endeavours and the ceaseless prayers of his innocent betrothed — all for the moment died away.

In the midst of acute grief the mind is subject to these fluctuations; and it may be that such lulls in the tempest of a great sorrow alone make it bearable.

And from this state of sudden mental quiet Michael passed, as was natural, after his long vigil and the fatigues of his previous journey from the north, into bodily slumber, which must have endured for some time, since he woke, with a start, to find Father Joseph saying mass.

There were only a few persons in the church, principally members of the household. The women were not distinguishable from one another, with black veils draped about their heads and shoulders.

Bernard was serving mass. The sunlight shone through the altar window upon his fair head. Michael knelt down and listened to words grown familiar during his long stay at Fort Aloysius. His soul was numb within him, and he made no attempt

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to follow the service, only listened, sullenly, to the low voice of the priest, and Bernard's clear responses.

After mass, some English prayers were said, and Michael's senses quickened suddenly, as at the sound of a familiar name uttered in a strange place, and a pang darted through his heart.

. . . *thy handmaiden Winefride, whom thou hast commanded to depart out of this world* . . .

He knelt on in his dark corner, no further words penetrating his consciousness, his head bowed on his arms; while those to whom Winefride had been so dear in this world, and whom she had held so dear, prayed for the repose of her soul who but a few hours since had knelt among them in that holy place.

He only stood apart, who had been dearer to her than all, refusing to pray for that little beloved soul which had started forth so suddenly upon its lonely journey — *commanded to depart out of this world* — while these others met her in spirit, and rose refreshed and comforted, and went silently away about their business, leaving him, the outsider, alone and desolate, in the empty church.

Suddenly his long hesitation —the honest doubts — the spiritual deadness — which had held him in bond, appeared to him puerile and despicable. His miserable soul yearned after the vanished soul of his chosen mate with such passion that he felt as though it must part from his body and follow her into the Unknown; and without knowledge, without conscious volition, he found that his whole being was convulsed with a dumb agony of prayer — the prayer of a man in despair, and in his despair as pitiful as a child.

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'Winefride! where are you? My little angel, where have you flown? If your soul sees me now in my desolation it must be sorrowful indeed. Listen to me. Come to me. Pray for me. What have I done to be punished like this? I have nothing — nothing to reproach myself with since the day you put your little hand in mine. Oh, why wasn't it strong enough to lead me all the way? Listen my sweet: it's true I was going to disappoint you; — it's true I was going to say I couldn't do what you wished; it's true I meant to force you to act against your pure conscience. Were you taken away because of that, I wonder, my darling? Oh forgive me, if that was why. Have pity on me. What was I to do? I tried so hard, honestly and humbly; I tried, God knows, to believe — and I couldn't, I *couldn't*. But I want to now. I want to now, more than anything else in the world, because you wanted it, and because I've no hope, nor wish, nor purpose left without you. But I can't — I can't. If it's true — why can't you come and show yourself to me for one little moment? I'd believe then. By God I would; I should know then. What would anything else in the world matter to me if I knew you were *somewhere*, my sweet? You believed in prayer, you believed in miracles. That poor dying monk smiled and said a miracle would be wrought. This is all the miracle I ask. One moment's sight of your dear face again in this world. One moment. Oh God, be merciful to me, and let me see her ——'

He lifted his strained, miserable, tearless face to the altar, and uttered a hoarse, strangled cry.

For in all the freshness of her girlish beauty — levelier, indeed, than he had ever seen her — she

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stood in the sunlight of the sanctuary, with her hands filled with white flowers, and her blue eyes gazing at him as though in startled wonder, and the filmy black lace square she always wore in the chapel veiling the glory of her fair hair, and making a shadow about her little, oval face and slender throat.

Dazed as he was by the shock, and want of food, and stress of feeling, he stumbled to his feet, caught at a projecting ledge of carved woodwork in a vain effort to save himself, and fell foward heavily in a dead faint, striking his forehead against the stone step of the font.

Thekla, taking upon herself the duty of tending the altar, which her sister had laid down for ever, had been startled by his cry, as she emerged from the door of the sacristy with her burden of flowers.

This was her first sight of Michael; but she knew him at once — the tall figure, the curly dark hair and handsome features — from the photograph Winefride had sent her.

But the look of sorrow, of yearning, of passionate, entreating love — that she had never seen, and it thrilled her innocent heart with a wild responsive pity.

The look — the recognition — was instantaneous; and then came the fall, and she dropped her burden of flowers instinctively and ran towards him.

He lay on his face and showed no signs of life, and she was frightened, being very young and inexperienced. So without attempting to raise him, or even touch him, she fled back to the sacristy, where she had left the old woman who cleaned the church, to ask advice and help.

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The old woman had vanished, and though Thekla ran out into the enclosure and shrubbery behind the chapel and called, she received no answer. She hurried towards the servants' offices, and then, changing her mind, turned again and came back to the church.

But during the short interval of her absence help had already come to Michael; for at the end of mass Father Joseph had discerned him in his dark corner, and observing that he did not appear at breakfast, he advised Bernard to return and persuade him to come in.

'Barney tells me he's been there since five this morning, and you tell me he wouldn't take any food last night. He'll make himself ill. I'd have given him credit for more sense; but there's no telling how grief will affect people's heads,' said Father Joseph, simply. 'Just go, like a good fellow, and tell him he's adding to our unhappiness and his own by refusing to join us, or I'll go if you like, but I know very well I'm not as tactful as I'd wish to be.'

'I'd rather go myself, Uncle Joe,' said Bernard, and he went.

He caught sight of the prone figure as he entered, and ran, as Thekla had done, to Michael's side; but he did not pause to call anyone, before lifting his friend's head tenderly; he then perceived the abrasion on the forehead, which was already swelling, and that Michael was completely unconscious.

He and Michael's servant and Father Joseph were presently carrying an insensible form out of the church and into the hall, where Michael was laid on a great leather couch; and amid the subdued excla-

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mations of Lady Gryffydd and Mrs. Loveden, Thekla slipped past the little group unperceived, and stole up the turret-staircase to her sister's room.

Fainting in church, after a prolonged fast, was no uncommon thing at Aberfraw; and as soon as the abrasion on Michael's forehead was discovered to be but skin-deep, Lady Gryffydd's alarm subsided, though she could not refrain from scolding Bernard for permitting his guest to go fasting to bed on the previous evening.

She blamed her son and not Michael.

'How could he have the heart, poor fellow, to think of eating and drinking? I always say it's one of the most dreadful things that with death in the house one goes on with one's meals as though nothing had happened. And yet — what is one to do?' she sighed, in her subdued weary undertone.

'Just give him a plate of strong soup directly he comes round, Bernard,' said Father Joseph, who, in spite of his honest grief and his true concern for Michael, was yet fidgeting to get to his own breakfast and his cup of hot coffee, which, after saying mass, was always sorely needed by the good man. 'Let him have a whiff of your mother's salts — that will bring him to. There, there — he's all right now,' and he hurried off to the dining-room.

Michael recovered consciousness suddenly and without the aid of the salts. He sat up, and drank a little of the coffee Mrs. Loveden brought him from the breakfast-table, and then asked earnestly if he might speak to Father Joseph alone.

With a regretful parting glance at the eggs and bacon, to which he had just helped himself, Father

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Joseph hurried into the hall, and the others returned to the breakfast-room. Presently he came back, looking rather disturbed and helpless.

'What shall I do? He wishes to be received into the Church at once — this moment.'

'Thank God!' said Mrs. Loveden.

'He must have come down here to tell her he was ready,' said Lady Gryffydd, and she hid her face and cried, with a mixture of feelings that she could not have analysed — regret to have misjudged Michael; relief in the certainty that this man would owe his salvation to her child, whom he had not yet been found worthy to wed.

'That accounts for his coming down so suddenly,' said Mrs. Loveden. 'Oh, poor little Winefride!' and she too wept.

'He has been fully prepared, of course,' said Father Joseph, looking from one to the other in the perplexity customary to him. 'But I do not like this haste — at such a moment.'

'How could there be a better moment? What is there to wait for?' cried Bernard, with his thin young face glowing.

Michael opened the door and walked in among them. He glanced restlessly round the room, and they suddenly realised the cause of Father Joseph's disturbed expression. For it crossed the minds of all three that he walked like a drunken man.

His face was deadly white, and his eyes burned strangely beneath the great swelling on his forehead, which had been sponged clear of blood; but he steadied himself against the table, and when he spoke they were reassured, for his speech was perfectly composed, and his voice clear and low.

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'I am very sorry,' he said, 'for giving you all so much trouble. But I hope you'll do what I ask. There need be no delay. I've been instructed for weeks and weeks. I've my general confession all prepared. I'm quite ready to make it. All I ask is just to be formally received. I — I was waiting for something — and now there's nothing more to wait for. And now, thank God! it's happened, just as Brother Emidius said it would.'

His eyes seemed to wander, but they caught Bernard's, full of joy and thankfulness and the fervour of the enthusiast, and Michael's expression became entreating.

'Look here,' he said, stretching out his hand to his friend. 'Tell them I'm all right, Bernard. I'm a bit shaken by my fall or faint, or whatever you say it was. But I'm all right. I know perfectly well what I'm asking. Don't let them put me off. Haven't we had lessons enough of the uncertainty of human life? There's — there's only a step between this world and the next — and — and — they've heard my call. I knew directly what I had to do. I'm afraid of any delay. See me through this, Bernard.'

'Why should there be a delay?' said Bernard, and he darted a fiery look of combined reproach and entreaty at his uncle.

'My boy, is it not the wish of my heart to receive him?' said Father Joseph, almost weeping. 'I only wish that there may be no unseemly haste. Father Keegan must be told ——'

'I want it to be at once, without a moment's delay, because —' said Michael, looking at them calmly — 'because I have reason to believe that I'm going to be ill ——'

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He spoke so slowly, so distinctly, and with such an authoritative aloofness, that not one of them dared to question him further, or to comment upon the strangeness of his proposition.

They looked into each other's faces, and had not a word to say.

The general confession was made, and Mrs. Loveden and Bernard, kneeling in their places in the church, thought it strangely short; conditional baptism was administered, and then Michael knelt on a long, long while before the altar.

Bernard alone waited for him, becoming at last uneasy lest his friend should over-fatigue himself after his faint, yet loth to disturb him. Eventually he rose and asked him in a whisper if he were ready to return to the house, and Michael answered in rather a thick voice that he was quite ready. He made his genuflexion and, to his companion's surprise, began to walk in the wrong direction. Bernard touched his arm, and he turned obediently and walked down the centre of the church to the entrance from the Castle.

He crossed the empty echoing hall steadily, and mounted the great staircase, and Bernard followed him, observing his dazed condition with concern. But when he asked him if he were going to lie down, and try to sleep off the effects of the knock on his head, Michael replied quite naturally that that was what he meant to do. And when Bernard asked him further, if he really felt ill, he answered 'Not at all' in rather a surprised tone.

They parted at the door of his room, but half an hour later Bernard, looking in, saw his friend

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lying on the bed asleep, and withdrew, feeling more satisfied. Returning again in another hour, he perceived that Michael's attitude was absolutely unchanged, and that he was deathly pale. He went to the bedside, bent over him and called him; receiving no answer he lifted one of the nerveless hands gently. It dropped from his fingers like the hand of a corpse; the pulse was feeble and intermittent. Much alarmed, the boy shook him by the shoulder, and called him more loudly, and to his infinite relief Michael opened his eyes, of which the pupils were curiously contracted, and answered him; relapsing almost instantly into apparent insensibility.

His breath came in faint, hardly perceptible sighs, and the swelling on his forehead was greatly increased.

The local doctor was sent for — a rough, kindly Welsh septuagenarian — and his verdict brought a new anxiety into the house of mourning.

'*I* once had concussion of the brain,' said Lady Gryffydd, alarmed. 'I was thrown out of a pony-carriage, on to my head, and stunned. But I wasn't able to get up and walk about after it, and be perfectly sensible. I was unconscious for an hour and a half, and then I came to and got gradually better. But it was a long time before I could bear any noise, and I suffered severely from headache. *He* had no headache. He was perfectly well after being a little sick and faint from the fall. This has come of itself from his grief, poor boy. He said he felt it coming on, Dr. Price-Jones, and I don't like his looks at all. He looks to me as though he were dying.'

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The doctor was accustomed to Lady Gryffydd, and though he pleased her by listening attentively to all her remarks, he seldom or never attempted to answer them.

'He must be kept absolutely quiet in a darkened room for a long time whateffer,' he said; 'and as he is a very important gentleman, and expense no object, I 'ould prefer to have a second opinion, becoss I am getting an old man.'

'We must have the best advice in the world, of course,' said the boy, who loved Michael.

The requiem mass was sung for the repose of the soul of Winefride Gryffydd; and the poor body that had been in life so tenderly loved and cared-for, lay mercifully hidden in its oaken case, beneath a white pall, heaped with flowers, before the altar in the chapel.

At the appointed time it was borne on the shoulders of humble friends and mourners to its last resting-place in the valley below the Castle; while Michael lay unknowing, in a darkened room, his spirit wandering in a world of shadows where time and events held no meaning.

Now and then he emerged partially from the mesh of dreaming which held him, and became dimly conscious of pain, and of a bewildering inability to fix his thoughts; and as these intervals of sensibility to outward things became more frequent, he fancied he discerned among the faces that hovered about him in the eternal twilight, the serene dark-eyed countenance of Edith Roath.

Gradually he became able to distinguish this apparition from the crowd of images that oppressed

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his distraught brain, and to assign it more certainty and solidity. He even faintly argued with himself that it must be real, because the face was framed in the severe white of a hospital-nurse's cap, such as he had often fancied Edith wearing, though he had never actually beheld her in one; and also because this was the only face that never travelled slowly up to the ceiling and vanished, like most of the faces he tried to follow with his eyes about the room.

The first coherent words he spoke were addressed to this vision, and the sound of an answering human voice, low, soothing, and cheerful, penetrated the mental mist that surrounded him, and brought an extraordinary sense of relief. He could not follow her explanation, but his mind rested contentedly on the impression it received. He slept quietly for many hours, and when he woke, asked the same question as before.

The nurse answered him in the simple words she would have used to a young child, and Michael saw that she had a kind face, and intelligent dark eyes, though the fleeting likeness to Edith Roath had vanished, and with it all perception of the association of ideas that had produced it; he tried to thank her, but presently growing confused he desisted, and again sank into slumber.

'Yes, Sir Bernard; he is really better,' said the nurse, weary with her long vigil, and greeting the usual inquiry in the early morning with a tired smile, which nevertheless had much of sympathy and interest. 'If I'm not mistaken he's going to get quite all right again, only you *must* remember that his brain is in a ticklish condition, and we shall

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have to be more on our guard than ever now against emotion or excitement.'

She was touched by the faithful devotion of the boy, who guarded the sick-room, literally, day and night, ensuring by his incessant vigilance the absolute quiet commanded by the great specialist. She was touched no less by the wide anxious blue eyes of the little fair sister who hovered in the background, in her black frock; not venturing to cross the threshold, but waiting breathlessly for the news her brother conveyed.

When the nurse came on duty again that night, she found her patient once more sleeping peacefully; but there were traces of tears upon his thin face, and on his thick black eyelashes; as though, like a child in his weakness, he had cried himself to sleep.

Then she knew that he had begun to think and to remember.

CHAPTER XX

'He ought to have a change,' said Lady Gryffydd, to the old Welsh doctor, uneasily. There was a vague fear clutching at her heart, founded, as only a mother's fears can be, on instinct rather than reason. 'I can't think why you don't insist, now that at last he has come to himself, on sending him for a change.'

'Where would you get a purer air than this?' said the doctor, resentfully. 'And besides, Mr. Ferrys is not fit to be moved at present. He could not stand the train.'

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'The least noise makes him jump out of his skin, poor fellow,' said Mrs. Loveden, sympathetically.

'Mrs. Kelson has written to beg us to let him drive over to Cwmcoel, and stay with her,' said Lady Gryffydd, faltering a little as she met her sister's astonished eyes. 'It is quite true, what she says, that these surroundings must be very bad for his spirits. And her house is much more comfortable than this.'

'I'd as soon send him to a mad-house direct, as let him be talked to death by that woman,' cried the old doctor, warmly.

'How can you think of such a thing, Mary Theresa?' said Mrs. Loveden, reproachfully. 'And he only just come back to life, as it were. Often and often have I thought how near death he looked as he lay with his poor shaven head on the pillow, and the marks of those dreadful leeches on his temples ——'

'I never for a moment thought he would die,' said Lady Gryffydd, with the certainty of one who, whilst far from wishing that a sufferer should not recover, yet holds him in no such special affection as to indulge in needless fears.

'It is not a question of dying,' said the old doctor, crossly, 'but of extending your hospitality to this young gentleman until he's fit to be moved.'

'I don't mean to be inhospitable,' said Lady Gryffydd, tearfully, 'though of course he can't stay here for ever. But when people talk of melancholia ——'

'Who has been talking of melancholia?' demanded the doctor.

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Lady Gryffydd evaded the question. 'You can't prevent people from talking, try as you will,' she said, resentfully, 'and when he lies there day after day, with his eyes closed — or staring at the ceiling with that frown between his brows — and taking no notice of anything or anybody — he used to be always laughing ——'

'He has had a terrible shock — mental as well as physical, Mary Theresa,' cried Mrs. Loveden.

'I don't know why you should talk as though he were the only one,' said Lady Gryffydd, tremulously. 'And poor Bernard has enough to do, one would think, to fight his own sorrow. It cannot be good for his spirits to live in Michael's sick-room as he does.'

'He doesn't go in very often. The nurse won't allow it. But it is true that he is always on the watch, and poor little Thekla, too,' said Mrs. Loveden in subdued tones.

'I have forbidden Thekla to go near the room, or to talk to the nurses either,' said Lady Gryffydd, almost sharply. 'What has Thekla to do with it? She does not know Michael. He has never even seen her. It — it is not good for a child of her age to be hanging about a sick-room,' she added, faltering once more as she met her sister's honest open gaze of reproach and wonder.

'The less anyone hangs about this sick room the better,' said the doctor, vaguely conscious of discord, and willing to soothe Lady Gryffydd's strange, and indeed unusual irritation. 'A few more days of absolute quiet will make a different man of him. But it's been left to me to oversee him, and until Sir William's been down again, I won't hear of his

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being moved. Later, Sir William will want him up in town, to be under his own eye for a while.'

'I cannot believe he is so bad as Sir William makes out,' said Lady Gryffydd, obstinately. 'I never believe in these great doctors; and it's not as if he'd fallen from a height.'

On the evening of the day when the great specialist — after due consultation with the local doctor — pronounced Michael to be out of danger, Thekla crept into her mother's room, in the dark, and waited for her to come up to bed.

It had been raining, and the damp made the room chilly, so that she presently put a match to the shavings beneath the great heap of old apple-logs and fir-cones on the open hearth. The flames illumined the lofty room with its gloomy four-poster, and the little cot which had once been Bernard's, and the tall uncurtained mullion windows through which could be seen the tossing branches of the forest trees that shaded the terrace against a wild night sky.

Thekla crouched beside the fire, holding tightly in her hand a little bundle of treasures attached to a slender gold chain which hung about her neck, and which was usually concealed beneath her dress; from the chain depended one or two medals such as convent children wear and cherish next their hearts, and a tiny blue silk case containing her sister's last letter, of which she knew the ending by heart.

'*How I count the days to your coming home in the summer and seeing Michael. I know you will love him at first sight; he has such an attractive face. But when you know him it will be his beautiful nature that*

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will attract you even more than his looks. Go on praying for him, darling Thekla. The only wish I have left in the world now is that he may receive the gift of faith.'

The poor child cried pitifully as she prayed for her sister's soul, and for Michael, and for grace to subdue a little rebellious heart . . .

She heard her mother's slow step on the stair — the weary step of increasing heaviness of flesh and spirit; and she heard her bid Mrs. Loveden good night, in her soft voice; and knew the sisters were exchanging the usual calm kind matter-of-fact kiss of custom and affection.

Then she uttered her faint call. 'Mother!'

'My darling! Were you waiting to say good-night to me? I didn't know. I thought you'd slipped up to bed. I would have come sooner if I'd known.'

'I wanted to speak to you.'

She flung herself impetuously against the soft round knees, as Lady Gryffydd sank into the easy chair within the circle of the grateful warmth of the wood-fire.

'Mother, let me go back to the convent now. Don't keep me here. Let me be a postulant as soon as they'll let me. Never mind what Uncle Ambrose says about Grandpapa's rule of waiting until a girl is one-and-twenty. Let me go back. I shall lose my vocation if you don't let me go now. Don't consult Aunt Lucy, or listen to anyone unless it's to Uncle Joseph, who always said it was wisest to let a girl go before she's tasted worldly pleasures, and not after. After, — after, — who knows what would happen to me after ——' said Thekla, with a

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little sob in her throat. 'Oh, mother, listen to me! Act on your own responsibility for once, and let me go away to-morrow. It's — it's for Winefride's sake I'm asking as much as for my own. It was all settled, and I was so happy — and now I've come back it's all slipping away, and I can't — I can't — make you understand,' she sobbed wildly and unrestrainedly.

But though Lady Gryffydd could be so undecided, so peevish, so inconsistent and foolish — in comparison with the calm and sensible Mrs. Loveden — she possessed nevertheless to the full the mother's quick insight and intuitive scent of danger, where her child was concerned; and though Winefride had been so dear to her, Thekla was dearer yet; the little black sheep !—in spite of her waywardness, or perhaps because of it, — was secretly her idol. A vague fear for her youngest-born leaped into her heart.

She laid her soft hands upon the fair head bowed against her knee, and soothed her weeping daughter with gentle caresses and murmured endearments.

'Hush, my darling. Hush, my baby. Do not cry. We needn't ask anybody's advice, you and I. And whether you go or stay is nobody's business but yours and mine. You shall go back to-morrow morning, and come home to me later when I'm alone; or stay and enter the novitiate, as you choose. Nobody shall come between me and my child, nor between my darling and her vocation, unless it be God's will,' said the poor lady, with the tears falling fast from those eyes of faded blue, already marred and dimmed with weeping for that other child who would cry to her for help no more.

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No breath of autumn had as yet touched the green woods, but the white mists clung heavily to the hillside and floated low in the valley above the river, and the dew lay thick and white as hoarfrost upon the grass beneath the loaded fruit-trees.

Thekla sped lightly over the mountain-paths and rocky steeps, for she was accustomed to the roughness of the way, and scarcely used the walking-stick she carried. The sun had not long risen when she reached the hermit's glen, and found Mr. Edyvean waiting for her beneath the thatched verandah of his cottage, with the remains of his frugal breakfast spread upon the table before him.

Her call had reached him long before she turned the corner of the little garden laid out upon the shelf of the hill — a slender black-clad figure, with her golden hair shining under the brim of her straw hat.

Mr. Edyvean wasted no time in greetings.

'Is he better?'

'Yes, he is better. Out of danger. He is going to get well,' said Thekla, but her tone was dejected.

He fetched a cup and poured out some coffee for her as a matter of course.

There was a strange sympathy between the two, and a mutual habit of taking things for granted which obviated the necessity for much explanation.

'Here are blackberries and cream, and lettuce, to eat with your bread-and-butter. I am sorry I have nothing more substantial ready.'

'I don't want to eat. I've come to say good-bye. I'm going back to the convent. I'm not sure I shall ever see you again,' she said, and seated herself on a three-legged stool beside the table.

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He observed drily that never was a long time; but being secretly tender of her youth and weakness, and remembering the long walk she had taken, he had no mind to allow her to exhaust herself by unnecessary fasting.

He rose, in his serene and leisurely fashion.

'I will come back and talk to you in a minute,' he said. 'I must go and lift my glue-pot off the fire. Meantime, eat and be thankful, little elf of the woods.'

He was absent for a few moments only; but returning, was relieved to find that she had mechanically imbibed the coffee; and was absently engaged with the blackberries and cream.

He forbore to make any comment, leant back in his armchair among the roughly-fashioned red cushions, and began stuffing the bowl of his pipe with tobacco, though he carefully refrained from lighting it.

Thekla finished the blackberries and bread-and-butter, and then sat silently staring over the gully, with her elbow on her knee and her chin in her hand.

She had thrown aside her old black hat, and he thought of her dead sister as he watched her; sighing as he remembered that lost fairness, which had been a thing of wonder to him, as was the fairness of little Thekla now.

The sunbeams had conquered the morning mist, and were slanting redly across the dewy woods and the garden — with its groups of glowing dahlias and great sunflowers; they shone upon the grey stones of the walls, and the rough yew-posts of the verandah.

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Thekla, leaning forward, was touched by one of these golden shafts, which lighted the pure transparent colour of her face, and dazzled her blue eyes, and turned the fine abundant hair that was combed up and off her brow, to a web of spun gold.

'You said the lad was better,' said Mr. Edyvean, at last, as she did not speak.

'Yes ——' Her colour came and went. 'The nurse let me peep in at the door this morning when he was asleep, and he looked quite different. She said the other nurse had no business to tell Mamma that his brain might turn out to be permanently injured and that the doctor would be very angry with her if he knew she had said anything of the kind. I like this nurse better than the other. I know that Bernard was afraid of something like that happening, because he was so angry with Mamma for saying that it would be far better to die than to lose one's reason; and he said that whatever happened he should take care of Michael as long as he lived.'

'He is very fond of him.'

'Yes,' said Thekla, and she was silent again for a few moments. Then she said —

'I can't stay very long because I am to go by the eleven-thirty train. But I couldn't go without telling you — and on my way back I am going to say good-bye to — to my Winnie's grave.' Her sweet lips quivered.

In spite of the similarity of features and colouring, there was none of Winefride's tranquillity of expression on Thekla's face; she was a creature of moods and whims, of smiles and frowns — impetuous as her dead sister had been placid of nature.

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'You mustn't try to stop my going,' she said, anticipating the hermit's words, with a spark in her blue eyes. 'I know — I know I'm doing right.'

'My dear! Who am I to try and stop you ——' he said, gently. 'You have a mother and a brother to advise you.'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'Oh, Mamma! And as for Bernard ——' a shadow crossed her brow, 'it was Winnie who was everything to him — he has always treated me like a child. But I'm no longer a child.'

Her bosom swelled and her face flushed.

'It is true. You are no longer a child,' he said, nodding his head.

'Only Winnie understood,' said Thekla. 'I wish I could go to her.' Her eyes filled. 'She would have known I was doing right, however hard it was.'

He was surprised, recalling the ecstatic letter in which Thekla had informed him of her vocation; and almost involuntarily the words escaped him —

'Has it become hard?'

He was astounded at the confusion into which the question threw her.

Her fair brow and cheeks, and even her white neck, flushed crimson.

'My dear — if you have changed your mind — no one in the world would have the right — or the heart — to blame you,' he said.

'Oh, you don't understand. The people who don't know never do,' she said, impatiently. 'You think someone is trying to make a nun of me against my will; trying to catch me and shut me up while I'm too young to know what I'm doing. If you

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only knew how unlike it is to anything of that kind! Why, half of them at the convent don't believe I've a vocation at all, and most of the others are very doubtful. I was always the naughtiest of all the children. But Reverend Mother says those are the kind who sometimes turn into the best nuns. The ones she distrusts are the converts who are so frightfully zealous to begin with, and think a vocation is the simplest thing in the world; not the ones who go in rather unwillingly than otherwise, knowing they're going to hate it all at first.'

'But if you hate it, why do you go, my poor little sprite?'

'I've got to try,' said Thekla. 'I've known I've got to try for ages and ages; and the more I've known it the more I've hated it. But it doesn't alter the necessity. I can't explain — people always think things they don't really know anything about, nonsense.'

'Not people so old as I,' said Mr. Edyvean, with a little twinkle in his hazel eyes. 'We will leave it to fools to condemn that of which they have no personal knowledge, little Thekla; and I have certainly no personal knowledge of the inner life of a convent. What I have heard and what I have read thereof does not much attract me, but,' he smiled, 'neither does the life on board ship attract me; I am a bad sailor, and I have no love for the ocean wave even when I am not sea-sick. Nevertheless I am aware that there are many who have a passion for the sea, and a craving for a seafaring life, incredible as it seems.'

'I should have thought you would have sympathised with the life of a religious,' said Thekla, wist-

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fully, 'you who have left the world, and are so solitary — like the old saints.'

'Solitude with freedom is one thing; but solitude in a community under obedience to superiors is another,' said Mr. Edyvean. 'Yet I understand that the life of a nun, — a holy woman given up to good works and prayer, may be a beautiful life. But not for you, little wild elf. You cannot see yourself as I see you, standing there in the sunshine, with the glory about you of your youth and health, and a colour in your face that is as delicate as the colour of the rose-geranium trailing from the basket over your head, — and not a whit more lasting. Little sister, enjoy the morning of your day while you may. The measure of your youth is but a little span; and by the time you have realised its value you are already old. Give life — and love — a chance before you hide yourself in a nun's veil. It may be that happiness undreamed-of is waiting for you in the great beautiful world of which you know nothing. If you miss it — nay — if you find it for a time and lose it in the end — when you are tired, and old, and disappointed and disillusioned — then surely it will be time enough for you to creep into the cloister, and seek for peace there to end your days.'

Thekla turned on him with a dramatic gesture, and her blue eyes — no less fiery than had been the blue eyes of old Sir Bryn Gryffydd — flashed on him with all the frank and lofty scorn of her intolerant youth.

'Mr. Edyvean,' she said, in breathless indignation, 'are you asking me to give to God the devil's leavings?'

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'Bernard!'

'Michael, old fellow.'

'You don't mean to say the nurse has actually left me alone, in such dangerous exciting company as yours!'

'On condition I promised only to talk of the weather and the crops,' the boy laughed tremulously to conceal the emotion that possessed him on seeing a faint shadow of the familiar smile on Michael's face once more.

'She's taken good care I should never have the chance to talk to you, or to anyone else, about anything,' said Michael, 'not that I've felt much like talking ——'

'Does you head hurt you still?'

'I've always more or less of a headache; that's what they're fussing about. I wonder what she says to you about me? I caught her trying to test my mental powers yesterday, and asked her if she thought I were in for aphasia.'

'What did she say?'

Bernard unwittingly betrayed his anxiety.

'Laughed me to scorn with well-acted surprise,' said Michael, grimly. 'I suppose she thinks I haven't the remotest idea of the whereabouts of the grey matter in the human brain-pan.'

'I'm sure I haven't.'

'You may take it from me that the corner of the font discovered it all right.'

'There's scarcely a mark left now,' said Bernard; 'the morning after your fall the whole of your face was quite black. And your eyes had absolutely disappeared. They were all bunged up like a prizefighter's.'

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'It must have been a pretty heavy fall, for there's no doubt I've had a bit of a brain-shake,' said Michael.

'Don't let's talk of it, or the nurse will be rowing me when she gets back. I've had orders to keep off the subject.'

'Well, you've obeyed orders up to date,' said Michael, 'but there's something I want to ask you before I pack up my sticks and follow the great Sir William back to London.'

'You're not fit for that yet.'

'I'm fitter than they think, and I'm going quite soon,' said Michael, quietly. 'As soon as I can stand the jar of the train. And directly I get there, I shall put that work in hand — you saw the plans ——'

'Michael! It was conditional ——' the boy faltered and broke down.

'It will be Winefride's monument,' said Michael; he uttered her name steadily — 'the fulfilment of one of her dearest wishes. We won't talk about it — but it's going to be done; and you'll be here, on the spot, to report progress. There, I've got that off my chest. Now I want to ask you a question.'

He closed his eyes for a moment, and then, shading them with his hand, looked at Bernard in the dim light of the wood-fire, which was carefully screened from the bed.

'It was you who found me, after my fall, wasn't it?'

'Yes. I rushed back and called Uncle Joe and your servant, and we carried you into the hall. You were quite unconscious.'

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'When you found me,' said Michael, 'was there anyone else in the church?'

'Not a soul.' Bernard looked surprised. 'We'd all left, and gone in to breakfast; and Uncle Joe sent me back at once to ask you to join us.'

'I see,' said Michael.

'I suppose you fainted so suddenly that you couldn't save yourself,' said Bernard. 'I did that once or twice at school, going to early mass fasting. Everything used to turn dark — but I generally managed to catch hold of something in time — and go out.'

'I never fainted before in my life that I know of,' said Michael, slowly. 'I remember everything turning dark as you say — and trying to save myself from falling — and all that happened up to that moment vividly — most vividly ——'

There was a little space of silence.

'The funny thing is that you should have seemed to recover so entirely,' said Bernard, 'and been so perfectly all right to all appearance; able to explain to us exactly what you wanted, and go through it all, before collapsing again so utterly. At least it seemed very strange to me; but the doctor said such intervals of complete consciousness were not uncommon in cases of concussion.

Michael made a sudden movement, and looked attentively at him.

'What do you mean?' he said.

'Don't you remember?' said the boy, startled.

'Remember what? I've told you I remember fainting in church. After that my mind is an absolute blank ——'

'But you told us you were all right over and over

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again. You seemed all right ——' urged Bernard, in dismay.

'Look here, old boy ——' said Michael, with a very evident effort to subdue the irritability born of his weakness, 'tell me exactly what happened, and no doubt it will all come back to me. As it is, it hurts me to think.'

Bernard told him.

He lay very still, with his face turned away; and Bernard waited, distressed and bewildered.

The fire had died down so low that the room was almost in darkness, and he could not judge of the expression of his friend's face, nor did he dare to disturb him with questions.

'That's all right, old fellow. Don't upset yourself,' said Michael, gently.

'Oh, Michael!' The boy's voice trembled. 'I can't help feeling responsible. Uncle Joe wanted to put it off, but I wouldn't let him. You said you were absolutely all right, over and over again; and you — you appealed to me. How could I fail you?'

'Aren't you glad you didn't?' said Michael, quietly.

'I *was* glad — when you seemed so near to death.' Bernard's voice sank to a whisper. 'I thanked God then over and over again, and thought that it was — Winefride's prayers —that she had prevailed in death where she had failed in life. She used to tell me so often she would gladly lay down her life to obtain this grace for you — she loved you so ——' his words ended in a sob. 'It all made it so clear to me that her — her death — which seemed so

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cruel — was not in vain. I thought how she must be rejoicing — and it helped me. I — I never dreamed you — didn't know what you were doing — you seemed so perfectly all right,' he repeated, in boyish misery.

'But the fact remains ——' said Michael, calmly.

'I — I suppose so. I don't know what Uncle Joe — will say ——'

'If he's given a chance to make himself wretched over a scruple of any kind you may be quite sure he'll avail himself of it,' said Michael, rather faintly. 'My loss of memory has nothing to do with you, nor with him, nor with anybody on earth except myself. I'll see him when I go up to London, and make everything all right.' He exerted himself to rise on his elbow, to give force to his injunction. 'You've only to hold your tongue, and dismiss everything from your mind but the fact that I'm — one of you — now — to all eternity.'

He lay back, exhausted, with glittering eyes, and in spite of himself, betrayed the pain he was suffering by pressing his hand to his throbbing brow.

But Bernard was too entirely engrossed in his anxiety for his friend's soul to think at all, for the moment, of his physical condition. Almost beside himself with relief and wonder, and joy, he gasped:

'Then you don't regret?'

'Regret! What have I to regret? Don't you see,' said Michael, 'that it's been taken out of my hands?'

'What have you done to him?' said the nurse angrily to Bernard, when, later, he came to the door

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of Michael's room to ask if he might bid him good-night.

'Is he worse?'

'Worse — there's his temperature gone up, and his eyes shining like stars, and his head fit to split. I shall have him tossing and sleepless all night.'

'I'm very sorry,' said poor Bernard.

She relented slightly at the sight of the alarm and contrition on his face.

'There, I daresay he'll quiet down again. You can go in and say good-night while I take these things away. But mind, no more talk of any kind. It's so disappointing to have him set back just when he was doing so well. There was your mother this morning, wanting to know when he'd be able to go to that blessed church again; would have worried *him* about it too if the doctor hadn't stood firm, and told her she might just as well offer to take him to a lunatic asylum at once and be done with it. And I told her myself. "There's a time for everything," I said.'

'Good-night, nurse.'

Though Bernard was but a boy — and so fair of face that he might have been a girl, — he was not wanting in a certain dignity when he was displeased, and the gravity of his look suddenly checked the volubility of the nurse.

'Good-night, Sir Bernard,' she said, in subdued tones, and stood aside to let him pass.

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CHAPTER XXI

It was Mrs. Loveden, who, with a boldness most unusual, took the initiative to her own surprise, and that of her sister, and invited Michael to her quiet little house.

'I can put you up, and a nurse as well, and make you very comfortable, until Sir William has done with you, which I daresay will be very soon ——' she said, apologetic in her diffidence. 'I have a nice spare room, and you would scarcely know you were in London, it is so quiet. Of course it will be dull for you — but if you would not mind that — and surely it would be better for you than an hotel,' she urged.

When Michael thanked her she shed tears.

'If you knew what a heartfelt pleasure it would be — for me, who lives all alone and have no one to think or plan for. And besides the pleasure for myself, it would be almost as though I were doing something for — for our darling. No one knows how I loved her nor how I miss her,' she said, with trembling lips.

'But you wouldn't like go to London at this time of year?'

'It is but a few days earlier than usual.'

'She always leaves us on the 1st of October,' said Lady Gryffydd, and Mrs. Loveden then knew that the plan found favour in her sister's eyes, and redoubled her entreaties.

'I shall be only too glad,' said Michael, inclined to accept, partly because he was touched by Mrs. Loveden's sincere anxiety to be of use to him, and

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partly because he was constitutionally reluctant to say No to anyone when it was possible to say Yes. 'But I shall feel I am acting selfishly in taking you away.'

'It is not that I shall not miss her,' said Lady Gryffydd, 'but I have Bernard. We are very happy together.'

'I think you and Bernard will be even glad to be alone together for a time,' said Mrs. Loveden, 'and later, you will be coming to me yourself, dearest; or perhaps going to Thekla's convent, as you said.'

Lady Gryffydd's expression scarcely changed, but the quickness of feminine perception, — above all the perception of a sister — told Mrs. Loveden that she had committed an indiscretion.

'Thekla! The little sister whom I have never seen,' said Michael, softly. 'Did she not come home for ——' he stopped abruptly.

'Only for a day or two,' faltered Mrs. Loveden.

'She is not happy away from her convent,' said Lady Gryffydd, 'you know she is going to be a nun. But about this plan of Lucy's — what could be better? ——' she turned the conversation with a haste which evinced plainly enough to her sister her alarm lest any interest or curiosity should be aroused in Michael concerning Thekla. 'The only difficulty would be, whether my sister has room for your servant?'

'Dear — dear — dear — it is strange I never thought of that,' said Mrs. Loveden, in such dismay that she forgot all about Thekla, in the thought of the flutter that the advent of Michael's dignified and serious-looking valet might cause among her

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quiet maids; and the difficulty of finding a room for him.

Michael calmed her anxiety by declaring that his servant would easily find quarters for himself, and keep himself entirely out of the way except when he was wanted; and presently all was settled, and the date of his departure for London fixed.

He was touched by the solicitude exhibited for him by the two sisters in the midst of their own grief — if that could be called grief which held so much of resignation. He observed their calm, their patience, and the consolation they found in their Faith — and thought of Mrs. Roath in the hour of her trial — of her restlessness — her despair. . . .

There began for Michael one of those periods of uneventful days which sometimes follow a great catastrophe or unusual happening of any kind.

With the adaptability of his pliant nature he took his place in Mrs. Loveden's home as though it had been his own, divining through his gift of sympathetic perception that his presence filled a gap in a lonely life; and giving a pleasure to the extent of which he could hardly gauge, to the childless woman who entertained him.

He accepted her care, and kindness and hospitality with the simplicity and gratitude natural to him; and his manner combined that happy mixture of deference and protectiveness which belongs to the ideal son of a woman's fond imagination.

'If he had but been *really* my son!' thought Mrs. Loveden in the intervals of her anxious thought for her guest's requirements; willing as she was, poor lady, to spend her frugal savings, or run herself off her legs, to get the young man who might have been

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her son anything he fancied, or anything that might be good for him, that could be obtained in all London.

'Oh, the blessing of children! That those who have them seem to take so calmly. It is very well to talk of the anxiety — but to have someone to be anxious about is all I would have asked! Where is the interest in ordering meals for oneself — making plans for oneself? People talk of young men being inconsiderate. I can't help thinking it must be the older people who lack consideration. They don't think of the poor boys, or study them sufficiently.' She could not help talking thus to her maid Sims. 'Look at Mr. Ferrys. Rich, and accustomed to the best of everything, and yet perfectly contented in this quiet little house, and with the company of an old woman like me.'

'I'm sure he gets the best of everything here, ma'am,' said Sims, resentfully.

'All very nice in a quiet way, Sims, but what do *you* know of the luxury of Paris hotels, pray?' said Mrs. Loveden, who had never been inside a Paris hotel in her life, as Sims was perfectly well aware.

'Nothing, ma'am, I'm glad to say; I'm not the kind that would be likely to go gadding to France,' said Sims, tossing her exclusive head. 'And I should find it hard to believe that such places would be good for a young gentleman recovering from brain fever.'

'Concussion.'

'It used to be called brain fever in my young days, ma'am,' said Sims, firmly. 'I'm old fashioned.'

'He's getting stronger every day, don't you think?'

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said Mrs. Loveden. 'He seems to be far less easily startled.'

'I don't know, ma'am. Eliza says he jumped out of his skin when she came into the room suddenly with the coals.'

'Eliza's movements would startle anyone,' said Mrs. Loveden, with displeasure. 'But the specialist said he was doing well, though he wants to keep him under his own eye a little longer.'

'Small blame to him — a rich young gentleman like that,' said the cynical Sims, but her tone softened. 'You're very good to him, ma'am, and no one could help liking him. He's one as has a way with him, and would be liked all the world over by high and low; and now that he's a good Catholic — but he looks as though he didn't care overmuch if he lived or died. One doesn't often come across true love now-a-days.'

'He has lost his high spirits, and that look as though he were always half-laughing, and no wonder,' sighed Mrs. Loveden. 'I don't know how we can raise his spirits, Sims; they said he was to be kept cheerful, but under the circumstances, it's not possible, even if one had the heart to try.'

'You might get his friends to come and visit him,' suggested Sims. 'He haven't seen a soul outside the family for a long time. It would make a break.'

'The very thing!' said Mrs. Loveden. 'A good idea, Sims.'

'Cheerful company is what's wanted — in cases of brain fever,' said Sims.

'I hope he won't bring a lot of rowdy young men about the house,' thought Mrs. Loveden, recalling the warnings of Mrs. Kelson of Cwmcoel with some

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alarm. 'But, however, even if he does — one would put up with a good deal if it would bring back his spirits, poor fellow, and make him take a little more interest in life.'

Far from bringing a number of rowdy young men to the house, Michael invited only two ladies to visit him; falling into the not uncommon masculine error of supposing that the females young or old, who took an affectionate interest in him, would, if they could but meet, be certain to take an equally affectionate interest in each other.

Aunt Milly, finding her beloved and only nephew comfortably established in the house of a woman of her own age, who — had it not been for the death of his betrothed would by this time probably have been his aunt by marriage — was seized with a jealousy so acute that for the moment her Christian charity fell completely into abeyance.

Her efforts to cheer Michael took the form of a burst of weeping as soon as she was left alone with him.

'My poor little Auntie — what's the matter?' he cried in dismay.

'I'm glad that woman has had the sense to leave us at last —' sobbed Aunt Milly, 'I thought she would never have done making conversation! A worldly creature, I am afraid.'

'The kindest creature on earth,' cried Michael.

'It may be so; but I distrust a woman who wears a false front; or if she must wear it, why need it be a sandy one? Grey would be more suitable for her age.'

'Aunt Milly! What has come to you?'

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'I don't know, my dear. I may be prejudiced; but I never did like the idea of putting on hair that had grown on other people's heads,' sobbed Aunt Milly, who wore her own thin soft locks parted on her brow, and twisted into the smallest of knots in the back of her neck, supporting thereby a disproportionate tortoiseshell comb.

'You are wearing a sheep's hair on your back at this moment,' — Aunt Milly started — 'and a calf's skin on your feet, and the shell torn from a live reptile —' she uttered a protesting shriek — 'below a bonnet trimmed with feathers plucked from a bird,' he persisted.

She refused to be convinced.

'That is quite different. Hair might belong to a dead woman ——'

'It is much more likely to belong to a healthy live Norwegian or Swiss peasant,' he said, kissing her. 'Don't talk nonsense, darling, and tell me what on earth is the matter with you? I never saw you like this before.'

'I've been thinking of you, and praying for you all these weeks — ever since I heard — and wondering why you never wrote. I was afraid I'd said either too much or too little in that letter I wrote you — God knows I grieved for you, but you mightn't have understood how much — for your old auntie was never a very good hand at expressing herself.'

'I understood it, darling, when I was able to read it, which wasn't for a long while.'

'They might have sent for me — your mother's own sister —' she sobbed, resentfully, 'and you at death's door.'

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'They might, and they would — if they had known your name, or where you lived.'

'Wasn't I good enough for you even to mention me to them?'

The lines on his brow deepened and he spoke a little wearily.

'My dear little auntie, don't be a goose. I told you my — engagement was conditional. The day it was a settled thing — as soon as the date of the marriage was fixed — if it had ever been fixed — should have brought — my poor little angel to see you — and only you — since you are the only relative I possess in the world.'

'Oh darling, forgive me. I know you have been loyal always,' she said, in contrite tones, 'but I can't get over the thought, that if you'd died — I should have seen it in the papers — no one would have sent a word to me.'

'That's true, but such things must often happen. And you'd have heard directly afterwards that I'd left you some money in my will,' said Michael, coaxingly. 'That would have cheered you up. Besides, you see I'm not dead, so you were spared hearing anything till I was well enough to send for you.'

'You are far too flippant, darling, and I should have been so happy if I had been allowed to come and nurse you ——'

'Heaven forbid,' thought Michael.

'—— and I should have brought you back to my own little home, though I know it's poor, and I couldn't have made you so comfortable as you are here,' she sighed, looking round the spotless bedroom, with its cream-tinted walls and carefully

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chosen coloured prints; its white enamelled furniture, green velvet carpet and rose and white china.

'It seems to me almost too fine for a man's room.'

'Much too fine,' said Michael, smiling, 'but it is Mrs. Loveden's best spare room, and she has put everything into it that she can think of to make it cheerful and pretty for her visitors. Are you angry with her even for that?'

'Oh, Michael, I am angry because it is she that is taking care of you and not me! It's only my wicked jealousy. You mustn't take any notice; only you should remember that I've nobody but you in the whole world, and my heart yearns after you.'

'Poor Mrs. Loveden has nobody either,' said the unwise young man.

'Nobody! Hasn't she a sister and two brothers alive? And a nephew and a niece left yet? Has the woman no feelings for her own family that she must needs run after other people's nephews?' cried Aunt Milly, with sincere indignation.

'For heaven's sake, let us talk of her no more,' said Michael, with a vexed laugh. 'I won't hear my hostess abused.'

'I'm afraid she's got round you, Michael.'

'I'm afraid she has, darling. But there's nothing to prevent you from getting round me, too, only you are really going the wrong way about it. Tell me what you've been doing with yourself, and how the old folk in the work-house are getting on.'

'I — I can't pretend to be interested in one thing when I'm thinking of another,' sobbed Miss Cedd. 'I leave that sort of acting to fine ladies. I have never been taught to hide my thoughts like these

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proud Papists. But you know as well as I do what is troubling my mind, Michael.'

'I asked you in my letter to leave that subject alone,' he said, softly.

'I know, I know. I haven't breathed a word.'

He thought her a pathetic little figure, sitting in a large armchair, dressed in her best grey alpaca, and best grey silk bonnet with white strings and feather. Her only ornament was a small pearl-encircled brooch, containing the hair of her dead parents and brother and sister, neatly worked into a four-leaved shamrock.

Her thin brown hair with its silver strands, was smoothed down on either side of her small worn face, with large guileless brown eyes, wrinkled eyelids, and lips that trembled with nervousness. Her doll-like hands, clothed in grey cotton gloves, were clasped tightly in her lap.

'Poor little thing —' said Michael tenderly. He could not help feeling it strange that anything so small, and so simple, and so frightened as Aunt Milly should be so near akin to himself; and he wondered, as he had often wondered before, if his mother would have been just such another, had she lived.

'Oh Michael, my darling! I know I promised not to talk about it, but if I were only cleverer! If I could only argue with you. There are so many arguments, but I lose my poor head and forget them all. Our dear old minister at home would have convinced you in a moment. He was such a wise man as well as such a holy one, that he could have found an answer to every question you chose to ask.'

'I will only ask you one, darling, and you can

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take as much time over the answer as you choose. Would you rather I had remained without any religion at all, or become a Roman Catholic?'

But Aunt Milly only hid her face and cried.

If Miss Cedd took no violent fancy to Mrs. Loveden, certainly Mrs. Loveden was not on her side, unduly prejudiced in favour of Miss Cedd.

'I don't think his aunt's visit cheered him up much,' she said to Sims, and thought privately that Michael's only relation had very odd manners and rather a remarkable appearance. 'It is curious he should be so unlike her.'

But being more reticent by nature, and better mannered by training than Miss Milly, she suffered no hint of her opinion of his aunt to escape her in Michael's presence, and merely expressed a civil hope that he had enjoyed her visit.

As luck would have it, Miss Cedd's next call was paid on the afternoon that Edith Roath had selected for coming to see her convalescent friend; and though Michael was fond of his aunt, he was annoyed at the coincidence.

'Do you mind? I don't like to send an excuse. She's old, and the only aunt I ever had,' he said, raising his eyebrows with an appealing expression, when his servant came in softly to ask whether he felt well enough for a second visitor.

'Of course I don't mind. Only tell me whether I'd better go and come back another day — or sit her out?' said Edith in her calm frank manner.

'Would you mind sitting her out?' he said, hesitating, 'though I am afraid she is liable,' his laugh was a vexed one — 'to stay a long time, poor dear.'

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'I'll use my judgment,' said Edith, nodding.

Aunt Milly was startled by the apparition of a new hospital nurse; tall, and of a rather commanding presence for one so young; with lustrous dark eyes set in a pale tired face, severely framed by her plain bonnet and velvet strings, tied beneath the firm chin; and a long cloak, which, thrown back, revealed the lines of a beautiful stately figure.

'Are you to have another nurse, my darling?'

'No,' said Michael, annoyed. 'This is Miss Roath.'

'But I am a nurse, all the same,' said Miss Roath, and her dark face dimpled into a sudden charming smile.

'You look very young to be a nurse. Can such hard work be good for you?' asked Aunt Milly.

'It is very interesting work. I think it is good for me; the want of sleep is the worst,' said Edith. She spoke with such simplicity and straightforwardness that Aunt Milly's prejudices melted, and she succumbed to Edith's charm; but showed so little sign of any intention to leave, that Miss Roath, with an expressive glance at Michael, presently rose, and said good-bye.

'Come again,' said Michael, and his brown eyes added urgency to the request.

'Of course,' she said, with calm kindness.

'That's what I call a really nice girl, Michael,' said Aunt Milly, warmly, when Edith had disappeared.

'I am glad you like her,' Michael could not help speaking drily. He knew now that he had been robbed of his talk with Edith, that he had looked

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forward to it, though he had told himself repeatedly that he looked forward to nothing in this world.

'But why is she a hospital nurse?'

'She wished to be one.'

'Has she no parents?'

'Only a mother. Her father died the other day.'

'And she's left her poor mother all alone?'

'Her poor mother wished to be left alone. Don't look horrified, darling,' he said, impatiently. 'They are the best of friends; they even adore each other; only each prefers living her own life and has no desire to see the other sacrifice herself.'

But this was a state of things far beyond the limits of Miss Cedd's imagination.

'I don't know what the world is coming to ——' she gasped.

Edith came again, and this time Michael took care that their conversation should not be interrupted.

She observed that his languor was a trifle less accentuated. The black circles under his eyes, and the furrow which pain had ploughed between his dark eyebrows were less marked.

'You are getting well,' she said, cheerfully.

'I suppose so.'

'Don't you want to get well?'

Her musical voice was severe.

'Not particularly —' Michael confessed, and then coloured. 'I don't want to talk like a melodramatic ass — but — what have I got to live for?'

She was silent for a moment, and then said gently and compassionately:

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'Are you so very unhappy?'

'I don't know.'

She looked surprised.

'I must talk real talk with you, or not at all —' he said, rather desperately. 'I — I suppose I am in a way — very unhappy — but I am also — in a way — at peace.'

'About her?'

'About myself.'

She waited.

'Do you know that I have become a Catholic?'

'I know nothing of you but what you tell me yourself.'

'Do you care to hear how it happened?'

'I care very much to hear anything you care to tell me.'

Her tone was one of frank sincerity. Her long-lashed brilliant eyes were softened by sympathy and interest, though they held not a trace of self-consciousness, as they were fixed earnestly upon his dark emotional face.

'I am prepared, of course, to hear you say that the whole thing was all hallucination — especially in view of what happened immediately afterwards.'

'I am not prepared to say anything of the kind,' she said, gently, but rather reprovingly.

'You may laugh at me — or be sorry for me, and say I have been the victim of a very natural delusion,' he went on. 'Perhaps it is so — I was never one to fail in the way of doubting — but — but — if it is all an illusion — pray God to leave it to me —' his tone took a note of anguish very real in spite of its forced lightness.

'Tell me,' said Edith 'and let me judge for my-

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self. Do not put words into my mouth. It is not given to you to read my heart, nor my thoughts.'

He obeyed, and told her simply, in a few words, of his unexpected arrival at Aberfraw, and of the tragic news that there awaited him.

'Every detail of that infernal night of misery and despair that heralded — her coming to me — is stamped on my brain,' he said, 'and I have only to close my eyes to see the dawn stealing over those hills — and the sunrise, — and the darkness of the stairs and the great hall, with the closed shutters, when I groped my way through the silent house to find the key of the chapel in the hiding place *she* had shown me. And the letting myself noiselessly into the silent church. The kind of lull in the storm of my grief and rage — for it was no less — as I found myself alone there; and the blessed sleep that fell upon me, and the waking to a kind of dulled remembrance of the horror that had killed all hope and happiness for me. And poor old Father de Bronville's tired voice saying mass, and the English prayers when they prayed for my darling's innocent soul. I suppose it was the sound of her name that broke up — what do they call it? — the fountains of my grief ——' He tried to laugh, and the sound of his laugh brought tears to Edith's eyes. 'For I found myself on my knees praying — almost aloud — I think — I knew vaguely that they had all gone — that I was alone — but I don't think I should have cared. I pleaded with God, — and with Winefride — for pity. I confessed the sin of which I was guilty, for I had come down the day before — while she was already lying cold and dead — to try and persuade her to act against her con-

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science. I said I was sorry like a child, and it was quite true I was sorry — then.

'My spirit almost seemed to go out of my body into the Unknown — searching for her — compelling her to return to me; and I asked that a miracle should be wrought, and that I should see her again for one moment, — for one instant — that I might know she yet existed, and believe. And while I was still asking — I saw her. Believe me or not as you like ——' His forehead was wet, and his great eyes were burning. 'I saw her standing in the sanctuary. Do you believe me?'

'Yes, yes, of course I believe you,' said Edith. Her expression was gentler than he had ever known it, and her tone was the soothing tone of the professional nurse, but Michael did not observe this. He gave her a look of passionate gratitude.

'God bless you. You always understand. I wasn't very likely to be deceived. It was broad daylight — sunlight, and I had been refreshed and calmed by sleep. I saw her standing there, with her fair hair shining in the sun, and her blue eyes, that I knew to be closed in death, wide open and looking at me — startled as though I had called her back too suddenly from the other world ——' His voice grew tender. 'And the shock of joy was too great, I suppose. I felt everything turning dark, and stretched out my hand to save myself, and felt myself falling; and after that, as is natural, I remember nothing.'

'Now rest ——' said Edith.

'I will rest when I have told you all. I wrote you the bare facts of my illness — but this I could not write. The first time I had an opportunity of

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talking to Bernard, he told me that there had been an interval — between my being picked up unconscious after my fall in church — and my long insensibility later.'

'That is not uncommon — in cases of concussion,' said Edith, nodding. 'I nursed a case in which a lady was thrown out of a covered wagonette and stunned; she recovered perfectly to all appearance, said she wasn't hurt, and walked a mile to her home, talking quite sensibly ——' She drew out her little narrative purposely to give Michael time to recover from the agitation into which his recital had thrown him. 'After her arrival her speech became incoherent, and she relapsed into complete insensibility for twenty-four hours; and when she recovered she remembered nothing of the walk home nor of her conversation, though she remembered the toppling over of the wagonette.'

'I also remember nothing that happened during my interval of consciousness,' said Michael — 'nevertheless, during that interval, and by my own urgent request — I was received into the Catholic Church.'

Edith was silent, but Michael was aware that her silence was fraught with sympathy and interest.

When he next spoke his manner showed no trace of the emotion which had possessed him.

'After my illness, when I came to myself — I used to lie and think, and think, in a kind of waking dream. I shunned all efforts to speak. It was no trial to me to abstain from talking and to keep absolutely quiet as they wished. My grief was stilled. It was as though the certainty that she *is* — and is happy and beautiful — more beautiful

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than ever — made grief impossible. Peace came to me. Now and then the thought touched me vaguely that I must rouse myself and fulfil the vow that I had made. That was like a wind ruffling the calm surface of my mind. But before the thought became insistent enough to trouble that calm overmuch, I heard that I had already been received into the Church. That the ceremony I dreaded was over. It was as though another miracle had been wrought for me; as though my angel's prayer had been granted, as it were, in spite of me. My angel! I can call her that now, which she would not let me call her while she lived.'

Edith seemed to hesitate, and then asked:

'You are practising your religion?'

'As far as I am able. I go to early mass every morning.'

'And you find comfort — consolation — in your faith?'

'Relief unspeakable. Can you not imagine what it is, to be freed from that debility of doubt which has paralysed my mind so long?'

She nodded, yet persisted.

'You have no more doubts? You accept all they tell you — unquestioningly?'

Michael paused.

'I will tell you —' he said, slowly. 'It is as though the details do not concern me; as though they were merged in the glory of the one stupendous fact that the dead do not die — that the immortal soul retains its individuality. I express myself badly, but I can better explain my meaning by saying that, if I attended the levée of a King whose subject I was proud to be, I shouldn't dream of dis-

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tracting myself during my audience — nor after, for that matter — by criticising and examining the origin of the ceremonies of the court. Such symbols of royalty have from time immemorial been found necessary to keep the underlying fact of real power before the minds of the people. If I were the master of the ceremonies I should doubtless give them my full attention. As it is, I leave all the rules and regulations, and the framing of the same, to those who have the collective experience of their predecessors in office to guide them, as well as the authority of the King himself . . . It amounts to this — we can't all be experts.'

He paused again, and said almost irritably, 'Why should these small things trouble me since I am once convinced of the reality of the power which they symbolise? Is it likely *I* could better the policy which Macaulay called 'the very masterpiece of human wisdom?' *I* want only to kneel where my angel knelt — to seek consolation where she would have had me seek it — to acknowledge that I accept the sign given to me. I have sailed out of a tempest into a dead calm. I'm content to rest there. I don't want to argue, nor to think, nor to struggle any more. I don't realise, even yet, what I've gained, nor what I've lost.'

'That's what I mean when I tell you I don't know whether I'm so very unhappy,' he said. 'I suppose I must be because the things of earth now seem to me of not the slightest consequence; my parting with Winefride but a momentary parting. It is only when one comes down from the heights,' he smiled faintly, 'to the boredom of convalescence,

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that life seems to stretch before one as so unbearably long and empty without her, that I wish I could be done with it once and for all.'

Edith's bright eyes scanned his pale, dark face. She noticed with compassion how much he had changed. The large, brown eyes, soft as a spaniel's, were now surrounded by great hollows, and melancholy in spite of the twinkle never wholly banished from their depths. His good looks, the fine shape of his head and features, were even more apparent in his thinness; but her critical observation noted the weakness of that handsome mouth and chin.

There were no firm lines of purpose drawn upon that face by the six-and-twenty sunny pleasant aimless years of Michael's life; his natural amiability and willingness to please had lent a certain sweetness, as his natural light-heartedness and humour had lent a certain charm to his expression. But the aimlessness had nevertheless stamped its mark upon his face, as surely as innate energy of will and consciousness of fulfilled endeavour, had given Edith that steady glance, and firm line of the pretty closed lips, and straight poise of the little classic head.

Unconsciously, as she looked at Michael, her expression changed; the latent energy that burned in her dark eyes made itself felt. He moved uneasily.

The thought occurred to him that the relief of disburdening his mind would be dearly paid for if Edith were to disturb the calm and settled melancholy which he termed content. And with his habitual quickness of perception he divined that she was minded to disturb it.

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'But since you can't be done with your life by wishing —' she said slowly, 'and since you have to live through the period of waiting which has been assigned to you by fate — what do you propose to do next?'

He answered more promptly than she expected.

'As soon as the doctor will let me — as soon as I am strong enough — I shall go, for a time at least, to Fort Aloysius.'

'I see.'

'I am not going, at least not entirely, for my own sake,' his desire for her good opinion impelled him to add, 'there is a boy there, a young monk, who is dying of consumption. I believe the knowledge of my conversion would help him — if he needed such help, which he most assuredly does not — to die happily. I could tell him, what I could not write. It was he who said that if a miracle were needed it would be worked,' he ended in a low tone.

'It is kind of you to go to him,' she said, with a softer note in her steady voice. 'Is that the Brother Emidius of whom you wrote to me?'

'Yes.'

He guessed what was in her mind, and said simply: 'If they could make a religious of me I should be only too glad. I would give them every chance. But I know it would be of no use. I should get sick to death of the monotony.'

She smiled.

'I cannot fancy you a monk.'

'Nor I,' he said, with the twinkle predominant. 'Yet it would save a great deal of trouble to have one's life ordered for one.'

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'Why should you shirk trouble?'

'I have shirked it all my life. I suppose you despise me for that.'

She looked at him gravely. 'It's probably purely physical.'

'Not at all,' he said, nettled. 'I have always had excellent health. If anything, I am rather stronger than the average man of my age.'

She rose and held out her hand, and bade him good-bye with the smile that made her face so charming, and a look of kindness in her eyes.

'You are thinking that in that case I ought to do something to justify my existence,' he said, deprecatingly.

'I have told you,' said Edith sedately, 'that it is not given to you to read my thoughts.'

'I wonder,' said Michael.

CHAPTER XXII

Edith did not see Michael again until early in the New Year, when in answer to a brief note asking whether he might call upon her, she wrote and told him that, ever since the outbreak of the war in South Africa, and the departure of her two soldier brothers, she had been nursing her uncle at his house in Eaton Place.

The drawing-room in which she awaited Michael's visit was bright with daffodils, and sweet with violets, and a faint sunshine strove to pierce the lace curtains which shrouded the tall windows.

Through those curtains she looked for an instant as a hansom dashed up to the door, and she saw

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Michael jump out, throw away his cigarette, and pay the driver as a second slighter figure descended.

She moved away, conscious of a quickening of her heart-beat, and also of a very distinct sensation of disappointment and annoyance.

There was a slight flush on her face as the door opened and the two young men entered, bringing with them something of freshness and vitality — a breath of the outside world of life and action — into that atmosphere of the past, which pervaded the old-fashioned room, with its stiffly-arranged antique furniture, and rows of family portraits.

She observed at once that Michael had recovered his health; he was wholesomely bronzed; his face was no longer thin, and his brown eyes were no longer hollow and melancholy-looking.

His companion, on the other hand, looked almost ethereally delicate, with his transparent colouring, fair hair, and large grave blue eyes.

'Sir Bernard Gryffydd,' said Michael. 'I know I'd no business to bring him without leave, and he did protest; but I wanted you to meet, the more especially since he's going off to South Africa with your brother Humphrey. You know I've just come from Clode. Why weren't you there?'

'I couldn't leave London — even if the war — telegrams — you know Frank has been a prisoner ever since Colenso — and I don't even know where Tom is.'

'I know,' he said, 'you've had an anxious time. It's been bad enough even for those who had no one to be anxious for; and you're not looking strong.'

She remembered that note in his voice which

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expressed so much more sympathy than words could convey.

'I had a breakdown,' she confessed. 'Not a bad one. So I came here, nominally to look after my uncle, who is not at all well; but he does not give me very much to do. I am resting. If things go well, I might take a little run into the country later, and gather some of these for myself.' She smiled, and touched the daffodils nearest.

'I wish you had come to Clode while I was there,' he said, regretfully.

'Humphrey was much too busy with his Yeomanry to want me. He wrote a hurried line to say how splendidly you had come forward to help.' She relieved Michael of embarrassment by turning quickly to Bernard.

'And you are going out with them?'

Bernard flushed and murmured that Michael had very kindly arranged ——

'We're going together,' Michael interrupted, answering the question in Edith's eyes with a smile. 'Yes, of course I'm going too. What do you take me for? It's not very kind of you, however, to look so glad.'

'I am glad because it proves that your health must be restored,' she said, lightly.

'I'm well enough to make quite a presentable target,' he said.

The presence of Bernard made conversation difficult, and Edith became subtly aware that Michael had brought the boy with him on purpose to avoid the intimate talk, which at the sight of her he now again desired.

They talked industriously of the war for a few

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minutes longer, and then Michael turned to Bernard, and with his usual frank simplicity suggested that he should take his leave.

'You said you wanted exercise. Why don't you walk to Mrs. Loveden's house? I'll be in time for luncheon, and she won't be sorry to get you all to herself for a bit.'

Bernard rose obediently, and Edith was secretly amused by Michael's easy air of authority.

His eyes followed the boy affectionately to the door, and as it closed he asked Edith:

'What do you think of him?'

'I thought he was going to be a monk,' she answered, inconsequently.

'So he was and so he is, but that does not prevent him from being a Patriot with a capital letter. No superior, modern, vulgar self-consciousness about either the word or the fact, so far as that boy is concerned. His one thought is to do what he considers to be his duty. And though you mightn't think it, with his girl's face and shy manner, he is less susceptible to criticism or ridicule than I am.'

'But I *should* have thought it,' said Edith, smiling. 'He looks too simple to be concerned with the opinions of others. You are not simple — but modern and complex. He would be an enthusiast whether as monk or soldier.'

'He won't make the worse monk for being a soldier first,' said Michael.

'And you?'

'I!' said Michael. 'Is it in *me* to be an enthusiast? Yet as you see, though I had sunk into a dream of content in my monastery, Humphrey's letter acted on me like a war-trumpet.'

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'You stayed at your monastery a long time.'

'The boy monk,' he said, with a sudden return to gravity, 'was a long time dying.'

'Is he dead?' she asked softly.

'He died the day Humphrey's letter came. I read it to him, and he said, with his eyes shining, "Of course you'll go!" I wonder if I should have decided to go if he hadn't said that? To me it is all so tangled; but to him and Bernard, how clear! *Englishmen are fighting their enemies. We are Englishmen.*' He laughed, but Edith's dark eyes met his in one burning look.

'My brothers ——' she said.

Michael nodded, and a gentle expression came into his brown eyes.

'For you it is not complicated either,' he said. 'But I — spent my childhood in South Africa. Yet one thing is certain. Frank is in prison, and I must go and help to try and get him out.'

He laughed again, but she knew that the laugh only covered the emotions which his nationality made it impossible for him to betray.

'Yet you have done all this — for your country.'

'Everything that has been done has been done by Humphrey.' He has worked like a — well, like a trooper. And a splendid lot of men he's managed to get together. I signed a cheque,' said Michael, 'and there my responsibility began and ended, thank Heaven.'

'You hate responsibility?' she said, wondering.

'As much as you and Humphrey love it. Look here!' He leant forward eagerly. 'You, who like Humphrey must certainly be a born organizer and leader and all that sort of thing — why don't *you*

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do something of the same kind that he is doing, in your own line? You raise and equip a field-hospital and a gang of first-class nurses and picked surgeons and what not, and let me — sign another cheque. Do you remember what we said to each other once about the certainty of that one obligation? Well, whatever one may feel about the necessity for fighting, the necessity for healing is undisputed. It would be with a real sigh of relief that I should sign *that* cheque.'

Edith's flush and sudden responsive smile lit up her dark face and restored the brilliancy of her tired eyes.

Then she shook her head.

'I can't.'

'Why not?'

'Uncle George. He's dying by inches though he doesn't know it; and though he might live another ten years, he might, on the other hand, get much worse any moment. He's an old man and he's been very good to me. I mustn't leave him. It really wouldn't be playing the game. He's no one in the world but me.'

'Your mother.'

'They can't get on for a moment.'

'It seems very absurd,' he said, discontentedly.

'Things are often absurd, but they are quite real for all that. It's not her fault. He's *really* impossible. I'm the only creature in the world he can do with. Don't tempt me away. It must be splendid, though, to be a fairy prince, and wave a wand and conjure dreams into realities,' she said. 'Get someone to take my place. Don't let the idea fade.'

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'It won't be the same,' said Michael. 'Now tell me of your mother. What's she doing, and where is she?'

'In Algiers.'

'The very setting!'

'Yes, and the climate suits her to perfection. Humphrey was dreadfully afraid she would dash off to South Africa to rescue Francis or to nurse wounded soldiers; but he elicited a definite promise that she would do neither.'

'Nurse soldiers! Your mother! A breath would blow her away!'

'No, she always finds strength to do what she wants to do. There are so many women like that. She can brace herself up to almost any exertion if she is interested and excited, and sometimes the effort seems to do her no harm; sometimes it exhausts her terribly. She is one of those people who droop in monotony and thrive in adventure. And she can be a marvellous nurse. She has a kind of magnetism — but of course for sustained effort she is quite unsuited. However, there is no question of anything of the kind; she is very much taken up with a friendship she has formed in Algiers ——'

Edith hesitated.

'Would you like to hear a bit of her letter? She would not mind. You must forgive her if it sounds a little disjointed. She writes as she thinks, and as she speaks, for that matter.'

She crossed the room to a small davenport, and bending over it, unlocked a drawer and took out a letter.

The pale spring sunshine illumined her plain black gown, and touched with a reddish light her soft

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dark hair, that curled a little in the nape of her neck and about her delicate ears. He remembered that it had been the expression of her personality in the rather stately carriage of her small head, and the grace and decision of her movements that had first attracted him; but when she came towards him again with the letter in her hand, and he tried to analyse the charm that personality held for him, it eluded him.

The memory of his dead love's exquisite fairness made his heart ache with a passion of pain absolutely physical whenever he dwelt upon it. He had no difficulty in analysing and defining that attraction. It lay, not only in her outward loveliness, which was of the type that most appealed to him, but in her extreme youth and almost pathetic innocence; in her ignorance of the outside world, and dependence upon him — and worship of him.

He thought of the blue eyes, which had held only the reflection of heaven in their pure depths; and of these dark eyes of Edith, which appeared to be considering the earth and all therein, and which looked into his own with the clear and steady vision of an equal.

He was even faintly, amusedly, conscious that the mental looking up was upon his side.

Not only would she carry off the palm in actual book-learning, but even where the emotions, facts, and stern realities of life were concerned, what had his idle wander-years revealed to him, that her hard daily work, and nights of watching in a great London hospital, had not more clearly revealed to that grave pale-faced girl of six-and-twenty, with her trained powers of observation and natural gifts of perception and understanding?

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She read her mother's letter in a low voice, with the clear enunciation peculiar to her.

'I have found the haven where I would be — a perfect climate, the surroundings and colour which best please my eyes, and — crowning miracle of all — a companion. The poet-ambassador, Lord Erconwald, is here recruiting after a severe illness; and mourning his first-born, who, as you know, was killed at Belmont. The younger boy is imprisoned at Pretoria with Frank.

'I knew Lady Erconwald long, long ago, when I was a girl and she was a girl. We went to our first dance together, both dressed in white tulle, and I remember envying her fairness, and her wonderful golden hair. But I remember also consoling myself with the knowledge that she was as stupid as an owl. I wonder if he found her so? She has been dead for many years, God rest her soul. She bore him two sons, and so fulfilled the whole duty of woman. He calls her "poor Carrie," when he speaks of her. She was fifteen years younger than he — we were married the same year — yet here he is, at sixty, full of vitality, with keen hazel eyes looking out of the finest, most massive head; interested in life, and thought, and books, and most of all in abstract subjects — while she, poor thing, lies in her grave; and her boy beside her at seven-and-twenty who lost her at seven. . . . He is terribly shaken by his son's death; yet not so much so but that he can turn his grief into verse. Has there ever been a poet who could not? Still, he has beautiful thoughts and must express them. I know the necessity.

'He has been always an ambitious man, and his ambition for the moment is dead with the son who held all his hopes. I gather the boy who is left is a waster.

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Perhaps they will teach him something up there in Pretoria, poor fellow.

'We are both so unhappy that we can only talk lightly, and even laugh, lest we should weep.

'We agreed yesterday that misfortune, as happening to one's neighbour, is taken as a matter of course; but as happening to oneself, fills one with irrational surprise.

'Other people's sons, for instance, are likely enough, alas, to be killed in this terrible war, but how amazing that it should be one's own son who must die! We followed it out and compared notes even on the subject of advancing age. How natural that your neighbour's hair should turn grey, but why yours, which has always been so remarkable for its gloss, and colour, etc.? Other people must expect to lose their figures after a certain age, but it is distressing, even absurd, that such a calamity should befall you who are accustomed to be as slim as an arrow! This means that he *is putting on flesh more rapidly than he could wish, and looks to me not only for sympathy but for surprise. This he pointed out satirically; for tho' he is an egotist he is a clear-sighted one. Yet only clear-sighted for a man. I, too, am fifteen years younger than he . . .*

'Oh, my dear, my darling, why do I write this stuff? Here is a man who has for seven-and-twenty years built all his hopes upon a young life vanished now as though it had never been; save for a few lines of print in a newspaper, and an item added to the record of an illustrious family; a name on a brass shield in a village church. Vanity of vanities indeed! It haunts me so at night, the picture of that boy's bright face and curly hair, as his father has described him to me again

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and again — one moment laughing and encouraging his men, and the next — a little patch of khaki lying still. I cry to God for mercy, thinking of the boys; and yet I go on with my own empty useless life; regretting, wildly, and vainly, the past; and all the while, which is so dreadful, conscious that I am improving in spirits from the mere fact of having someone to talk to; a real person who understands, as you would understand, child of my heart; and sees from a point of view, moreover, which is nearer mine than yours could ever be, on account of your age alone.

'With this tearing and gnawing anxiety for the boys, however, it is everything to be distracted and interested, and I don't think I could bear the dreariness of a London winter. The sunshine here is giving me back my health, that I thought each year would fail a little more and a little more; and in the heat and the colour, I revive; my soul expands to receive new impressions. Yet if you wanted me, my darling, I would fly to you; though I would rather you spread your wings and flew here to me. I get news almost as quickly as you do in London. Everything is telegraphed to him, and he sends every telegram to me. I don't like to think how much I shall miss him presently when he goes back to his post.

'But for him, *grief will be easier to bear, perhaps, after the first shock, amid the distractions of a great capital, in the position which is his, than in this quiet invalid life. I have promised to go and stay with him some day . . .'*

Edith folded the letter, and said without looking at Michael:

'It is a great load off my mind to think of her, as she says, in the sunshine and warmth and bright-

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ness. Poor little thing. The grey of the north; the matter-of-factness of the Roaths — they have chilled and bewildered her spirit for so many years.'

'I suppose you are matter-of-fact,' said Michael, 'but then, also, you understand.'

She smiled.

'I have something of her in me, also.'

'Tell me,' he said, suddenly, 'have you seen anything of Mrs. Loveden lately?'

'Yes, she asked me to come and see her, and I have been, several times.'

'She is very fond of you.'

'I like her,' said Edith, gravely.

He laughed. 'Her fondness follows as a matter of course! And my poor little Aunt Milly — who is miserable because I am going to the war, and would be even more miserable if I didn't go?'

'I like her too.' This time Edith laughed also.

'Poor little soul; full of inconsequence and good works,' said Michael, rather tenderly. '*Apropos*, I have a favour to ask you.'

'Yes.'

'If I — by chance — get knocked on the head out yonder — will you give an eye to the poor old dear? You congratulated me once on having no relations, but the situation has its drawbacks. One has to depend on friends.'

'I would far rather depend on friends than relations, as a rule,' said Edith. 'Yes, I promise you.'

'I've left her some money, of course,' he said simply. 'But she won't know what to do with it. Yet she'd be hurt if I passed her over. It will give her some pleasure to hoard it up and leave it to an orphanage, I suppose.' He paused and added,

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'I don't know why I should bore you with my affairs, but I've had to put them in order, you see, before leaving; and as I venture to count you a friend ——'

'I'm a friend all right,' said Edith, and gave him her hand for an instant.

The door opened to admit Colonel Bertwald. It seemed to Michael that the old gentleman had grown pathetically smaller. His hands twitched more nervously than ever, and the long white hairs of his eyebrows hung down like curtains across his piercing eyes.

'So you're off with Humphrey,' he said, eagerly and tremulously. 'I wish to God I were coming with you, young man. *I* never got a chance like this.'

'I wish you were, sir.'

'I'm tied by the leg, literally by the leg. They've no use for old men, I'm told. Pack of stuff and nonsense. Old men who could shoot, to guard the lines of communication, would set the young ones free to fight. No originality! Our enemies teach us every time the absurdity of our red tape, but we never learn. White beards enough wag in *their* ranks to the confusion of our raw recruits. Well, Englishmen blunder on as the laughing-stock of the world. God help us. This winter's broken me up.' His voice shook. 'I'd give all the life left in me — not much — for a single month — a week — in the field. But I'm out of it all. Well, well, you've done *your* duty, eh? Shown you're the son of old Sandy Ferrys. Poured out money like water, I hear, and going out as a simple trooper to serve with the very men you've mounted and equipped and all the rest of it.'

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'Your nephew, Humphrey Roath ——'

'Aye, aye. I know all about that. Humphrey's a good lad. And you'll come back and stand for Parliament?'

Michael laughed.

'Will you come and canvas for me, sir?'

'With all my heart. I'm busy canvassing on my own account now. A campaign against church-bells. If you had a house in London, I'd get you to sign my petition. They're an anachronism — and a public nuisance, and what besides only those who nurse the sick and dying can tell you. Torture, simple torture to nerves like mine. Used to call people together before clocks were invented, and continued from sheer force of habit and stupidity now when every tramp and schoolboy wears a watch. But I'll never rest till I silence them. If I can't fight anything else, I'll fight idiotic anachronisms.' His eyes gleamed fiercely, and grew suddenly tender as they lighted on Edith.

'How d'ye think she's looking?'

'A little tired, perhaps,' said Michael, gently.

'Works herself to death. A thorough Bertwald. So's her mother. Can't be still for a moment. Must be up and doing. Well, I won't keep you. I wanted to congratulate you, no more.' He nodded, and hobbled off, slamming the door vigorously behind him.

'You see a change?' asked Edith.

'A great change.'

'His mind is more restless than ever, and his letters to the newspapers more frequent and forcible. I wish he could get only one of his reforms through successfully before he dies, poor dear. But I'm

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afraid he won't. All his measures are so very drastic.'

'He must bore you with them above a bit now and then,' said Michael, frankly.

'It is only fair,' said Edith. 'Think how I must have bored him, ten years ago, when I was sure of everything in heaven and earth and quite as anxious to teach him as he could be to teach the world. And he never even boxed my little saucy ears!'

'I daresay he would have been less patient with your brothers.'

'No doubt. He had a weakness for me. Besides he is one of those old-fashioned men who do not take women seriously, and who never tire of repeating that they have no reasoning power and no sense of humour.'

'I don't think women have much humour,' confessed Michael. Edith shook her head reprovingly.

'Women have learned through the ages that it is politic to laugh at men's jokes; and thus has been created an impression that the male sex is the wittier.'

'That proves that women are artful, but not that they are humorous. However, I suppose if they had once given way to their sense of the ridiculous, they would die of laughing at the vanity of man.'

They both laughed, and Michael was inspired to take leave before the colour and animation had died out of her face.

'We have said almost nothing that I thought we should say,' Edith reflected, as she sat over the fire with a book in her lap, not even making a pretence to read. 'Yet he cheered me, and made everything seem a little brighter. Is it magnetism

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or what? One feels the sorrow is still there — in the background, but there is something incurably light-hearted — the merry heart that will go all the way, and never grow old. The world about him will always be the brighter for his existence.'

The room in which she sat was presently the brighter through Michael's existence, for into it was carried an immense extravagant gilt basket of forced roses and fragrant lilies of the valley.

She shook her head, but in spite of herself a little warmth of pleasure and gratitude stole about her anxious heart.

CHAPTER XXIII

When the time came for Michael to make his few farewells, there was one among the few which he would have avoided had it been possible to do so.

Mrs. Carseleigh's summons was however so urgent that to neglect it was, to his good nature, not possible; and he drove unwillingly to her mother's house in Kensington, on the eve of his departure for South Africa.

Although he appeared in the drawing-room five minutes after the hour appointed for his reception, it seemed as though Mrs. Carseleigh had not expected him so soon, for she was seated at the piano, and so much engrossed in the song she was singing that his entry caused her to start violently, before she uttered a little cry of surprise and ecstasy, and came forward with both hands stretched forth in greeting.

On the way upstairs Michael had encountered a lean, faded woman in whom he recognised without

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difficulty Mrs. Carseleigh's mother. There was the red hair thinned and silvered; the large light eyes grown prominent and slightly bloodshot; the willowy bending hollow-chested even figure somewhat shrunken. But the thin lipped mouth in the colourless fleshless face was rather patient than peevish in expression, and her frightened look seemed to apologise for her presence on her own staircase as she stole noiselessly past him, followed by two tall awkward schoolgirls, who glanced at him furtively and hastened to make way.

The three were dressed for walking very plainly and unfashionably in unrelieved black; the lady for her son and the children for their father. Mrs. Carseleigh's husband, however, had, it appeared, an unconquerable prejudice against mourning, and although he was at present in South Africa, his wife respected his wishes, and regretted her brother's death none the less, as she pathetically said, because she did not display the conventional outward signs of grief.

Michael was fond of music, but he did not love Mrs. Carseleigh's singing, which scarcely rose above the average level of the amateur of her class, and jarred upon an ear trained in the opera-houses of Europe; wherefore he did not press her to resume her song, though he apologised sincerely for interrupting it, before he released those welcoming hands.

She moved languidly, as was her wont, for a clinging princess gown of velveteen does not lend itself to sprightliness; and seated herself opposite him, clasping those over-ringed hands round pointed velvet knees, and gazing at him with earnest heavy-lidded eyes.

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He found himself abstractedly wondering whether the unnaturally large ruby on her forefinger could be real, and decided without much difficulty that it was not.

'It is good to see you again,' murmured Mrs. Carseleigh, with dreamy ecstasy. 'I thought you were never coming. It's been such a terrible winter. You know my poor boy is at the front.'

Michael had some difficulty in recognising this allusion to Major Carseleigh, and the twinkle predominated for a moment, but he replied with suitable gravity, 'Yes, I know. So you've stayed on here?'

'I've been here all the winter, and though I've written to you three times I've had no answer.'

'I've been ill,' said Michael, 'and out of London.'

'You look the picture of health,' she said, rather resentfully. 'Do you know I never got a word of news about you from anyone till this week?'

Michael was glad to hear it, but he assumed, unconsciously, a contrite expression.

'Somebody told me that your engagement was broken off, and that you were going out to South Africa with Captain Roath. Is it true?'

'I am not going to be married, and I am going out with the Yeomanry.'

'I've met Captain Roath. He is such a dear, and so good-looking,' said Mrs. Carseleigh. 'And you're not going to be married after all! You'll forgive me for being glad. I *can't* somehow imagine you as a married man. It doesn't tally one bit with the *real* you — the Michael Ferrys whom *I* know. After all, there was a time when I knew you pretty well.' She sighed reproachfully. 'When we used to — con-

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fide in each other and find a certain amount of consolation ——'

Michael was guiltily conscious that he had reposed only just as much confidence in this lady as was necessary to make himself interesting in her eyes; but he was also thankfully aware that he had at no time told her anything that could not have been shouted from the house-tops of Cairo, so far as his feelings were concerned. He found himself wondering idly how far the Michael Ferrys whom she knew resembled himself, as he answered with vague cheerfulness —

'One must confide in somebody.'

'And when one has nobody?' she said quickly.

'Wasn't that your mother whom I met on the staircase with two little girls?'

'I thought they had gone out,' said Mrs. Carseleigh. 'You aren't proposing I should confide in Mamma!'

'She looks sympathetic — like you.'

The unreal laugh rang out. 'Poor Mamma! Her mind is full of the butcher and the baker and the candlestick-maker. *My* troubles would appear to her purely imaginary beside the problem of how to clothe those gawky geese on nothing a year.'

'Is she so badly off?' said Michael, in a low voice.

Mrs. Carseleigh shrugged her shoulders. 'She has her pension — and theirs. How much money do you suppose my brother left his motherless kids? He was in the Indian army. When Mamma brought them here their school-bills hadn't been paid for two years.'

Michael glanced about him.

It was obviously the room of a retired Anglo-

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Indian; a certain number of carved wood tables, brass ornaments, and bazaar draperies, supplemented the wicker-work furniture.

Mrs. Carseleigh's father had been a Collector in India, who after twenty years' service in the tropics had crawled home to die of chronic dysentery, in this cheap Kensington house.

Michael remembered vaguely the details of a common enough family history, which had once been dramatically recited to him by Mrs. Carseleigh; and he recalled the colourless dried face of the woman on the staircase, who was perhaps fifty years old, and who looked sixty-five.

'When did your father die?'

'Ten years ago.' Mrs. Carseleigh added hastily, 'Of course she clings to this horrid house. The room revolts me. It jars on every sense.'

She shuddered affectedly. 'Think of *me* here! After the heat and colour and light of Cairo! Looking out on this drab prospect; the mean ugly houses opposite — and these faded rickety things, all scented with London soot and fog.'

'And your mother? She has lived in the East, too.'

'Of course, all her life. How you do go on about Mamma. Did you stop and talk to her?'

'No, she scarcely vouchsafed me a look. But — her likeness to you interested me. And ——'

'Well?'

'The patience — the sorrow of her face,' he said, in a low voice.

'Oh, she's patient enough. Do you know anything more aggravating than patience?' said Mrs. Carseleigh. 'Except being prayed for?'

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Michael looked at her with a gravity in his brown eyes that extinguished the twinkle altogether.

'I know you think I'm a brute,' she said, and her flush was perceptible despite the powder that whitened her face. 'But if you knew the hopeless dreariness of life here. It was bad enough when I was alone with Mamma; but with these two hulking girls filling up every corner, and staring at one with those great eyes whatever one says or does, and watching one's goings out and one's comings in; and Mamma always ailing and often ill, and the eternal feeling that one can't afford anything — I wish I'd stayed in Cairo. I wish I hadn't left Jim. I was always fonder of him than anyone suspected. And at least *he* cared for me —' she said bitterly.

'He'll be coming home,' was all Michael could find to say.

'I expect he'll be killed.'

'Why should you expect that? You're out of sorts,' said Michael, soothingly.

'It's seeing you, I suppose.' She rose, and moved restlessly to the window, and stood with her back to him looking out. Always she saw herself as in a picture, and when she swung slowly round to face him, leaning her head against the green velveteen arm that was lifted to hold back the folds of the blue-spangled curtain, she knew that the light would fall becomingly on her tawny hair, and that the graceful lines of her drooping figure were silhouetted against the window, so that he could not fail to observe them.

'I suppose you've left off — caring — altogether,' she said, in a low voice.

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Michael wished he had not yielded to her urgent summons.

'My dear Lilah, what is the matter? You're regularly hipped,' he said, impatiently. 'Do I ever leave off caring for my friends? What's the matter? Is anything bothering you? Can't I help you?'

He had risen when she did, and moved now rather awkwardly towards the window. Her reply was irrelevant.

'Is it true you've become an R.C.?'

'I thought you'd heard nothing about me,' he said. 'Yes. It's quite true.'

'Is that what's made you — different?'

'Am I different? It's made me much happier.'

'I've often thought of becoming one,' said Mrs. Carseleigh, still leaning her head on her arm. 'Do you go to the Oratory?'

'Yes.'

'Will you take me to-morrow?'

He shook his head and laughed.

'I don't want my thoughts disturbed. It is quite difficult enough to keep them fixed.'

'I really mean it,' she pleaded. 'I adore the Oratory. Surely if I am your friend you ought to wish to convert me? Why won't you let me come to church with you?'

'I like to take my religion — neat,' he said bluntly.

'Not diluted with sentiment. I see,' she said, resentfully. 'You *do* take yourself seriously.'

'I'm trying to,' he explained.

'Our friendship is the only thing that you don't take seriously,' she said, with some real bitterness. 'Well, I suppose I've no right to complain. I

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stipulated myself it was not to be taken in the light of anything but a passing whim — at the time ——'

Michael had been too polite to remind her of this fact, and he hastened to assist her drooping self-respect to revive.

'Friendship is friendship,' he said with convenient banality, 'and I hope you will always let me count myself among your friends, however capricious your likings may be.'

'I daresay I used to be capricious. That's all over now. I've suffered for it, God knows. I suppose in your new rôle of *dévot*, it never occurs to you to pray for *me?*' she said.

'I will if you wish it,' he said, with his usual engaging frankness, and total lack of self-consciousness. 'But if you object to your mother's prayers — which must be better worth having ——'

'Mamma's religion simply aggravates me. She prays for hours up in her room, and not content with that, steals out into the fog with the two girls every morning to the little Anglican church round the corner, and comes back coughing worse than ever, with red eyes ——'

'Why do you speak of her so unkindly?'

She moved impatiently. 'You don't understand.'

He waited.

'If you saw someone always suffering — suffering — suffering — and never complaining and working her fingers to the bone — and you could do nothing to help her — wouldn't it get on your nerves?'

'I suppose it might. Does she suffer so much?'

'Frightfully at times.'

'Can nothing relieve her?'

'I suppose change of air, and treatment, and

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comforts and rest, might help. They advise an operation. But that would cost money and leave her helpless for a long time afterwards — if she recovered. She won't have it, and she'd rather die than go to a place where they'd do it for nothing. Silly pride, but that's Mamma all over. She'd rather suffer anything than complain or ask for help.'

Michael came a step nearer.

'Lilah, let me help her?'

'We've not come to that yet. Don't. I'm sorry I told you.'

'Mayn't I speak to you frankly, as a friend? And offer help as a friend offers it? You said we were friends just now.'

'We are, we are. You know I've always cared. I never cared for anyone but you,' she said, bursting into tears.

'That isn't true,' said Michael, bluntly.

'Yes, it is,' she persisted. 'I was only — in fun — I only wanted it to be a — passing flirtation at first — and then — it took hold of me. The others were — were — just nothing — after you came along. That's what made me so frightfully restless ever since. You can't think I really cared for Rosterleigh. A fat old *roué* — making love to every personable-looking woman he sees, and thinking nobody knows anything about it, like an ostrich hiding its head. Why, any moment, I'd rather have been friends with Lady Rosterleigh, who wouldn't touch me with a pair of tongs, though he made her invite me to their house.'

'Why did you go?'

'If she'd been nice to me, I wouldn't,' sobbed

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Mrs. Carseleigh. 'But she treated me like — oh, you know, the iced politeness which women who are too well-bred to be cats, use instead of abusing you. It hurts much more, and they know it.'

'You were hurting her, I suppose.'

'Such rot. She knows well enough I'm not the sort of woman he'd ever have dreamt of *marrying*,' she said, resentfully, 'and if it comes to that, he'd have bored me to death if he hadn't been Lord Rosterleigh. I don't pretend I'm not a snob. I only took him on to annoy the old cats on board ship, and because I was bored —'

'What would make you less bored?' he interrupted.

'I wish I'd had a child,' she said miserably.

'Couldn't you be good to those two poor little souls I saw on the staircase?'

'Those great gawks! How like a man to be so silly. I want a *little* child, whom I could pick up in my arms, and hug, and dress prettily.'

'I think you'd get rather bored even then, you know,' said Michael, smiling. 'And the gawks, as you call them, would pay for dressing. They've got hair like yours, and you could make them adore you — be their fairy godmother.'

'Do you know what poor Jim allows me?' she asked derisively, and added in haste, 'Every penny he can, of course — but though you think I'm such a brute, I take my fair share of the miserable expenses here. It's hard to sometimes — when one's fond of pretty things.'

'Of course it is,' he said, with his ready sympathy, and as he dared not offer to help again there was a pause.

'When are you going?' she asked.

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'At once. To-morrow.'

'You put off coming to see me till the last moment.'

This being true he could not deny it.

'I've been very rushed,' he said.

'Everyone I care for has gone. It's horrid. I wanted to go as a nurse, but they wouldn't have me. So there isn't anything I can do except wait for Jim to come home. Oh, Michael, I do hope nothing will happen to you out there. Can't you realise how I care? But I suppose it only embarrasses you for me to say that.'

'I've not so many people to care for me that I can afford to be ungrateful,' said Michael. 'Now I'm going.'

She put her hands into his, and he stooped and kissed her cheek with a more kindly and pitiful feeling for her than he had known for some time past.

'Will you write to me?' she said, with tears in her eyes.

'Of course I'll write. Keep up your spirits, and when I'm gone ——'

'Yes?'

His eyes twinkled.

'The Oratory will still be there, you know,' he suggested, 'I'm not taking it with me.'

Michael went straight from the house in Kensington to the Bond Street jeweller with whom he was accustomed to deal. There he chose a string of pearls, with a diamond clasp, whereof the price was fifteen hundred pounds.

He believed that he was a judge of pearls, and the well-bred jeweller corroborated his opinion so

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adroitly that he did not perceive he was being flattered.

The pearls were fine ones, as a matter of fact, white and round and even, but before he definitely concluded his bargain, Michael made certain stipulations with the owner of the establishment which might not have been accepted so readily from a client less tried and trusted than the son of the great Alexander Ferrys.

He returned to the Berkeley Hotel with the necklace packed and sealed, in his pocket, and there wrote a note to Mrs. Carseleigh and sent it, with the parcel, by his servant to the house in Kensington.

'I leave London to-night and I am scribbling this to bid you good-bye, and to ask you to wear the enclosed sometimes as a souvenir of your friend, whether anything happens to me or whether it doesn't. If you don't like it, I've made arrangements whereby you can either change it for anything you like better, or they'll take it back altogether and you can go elsewhere to choose anything you wish in its stead.

'This only applies to the pearls. The clasp I want you to keep anyhow as I chose it especially for its original shape, whereas one pearl is so like another that one can't attach much sentiment to them.

'Don't forget my parting shot, by the bye!

M. F.'

Mrs. Carseleigh took the letter and the parcel up to her own room, and locked her door, to be secure from any possible interruption.

The yellow fog was pressing against the uncurtained windows, and its chill foul breath pervaded her sleeping chamber, fireless and cheerless already.

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Some tawdry effect of decoration had been produced by art muslin; and a pink silk shade over the gas light softened her reflection in the common looking-glass.

She opened the parcel first, and sat before the dressing-table with the string of pearls in her hand. Her heart beat fast.

'They must be worth a thousand pounds at least,' she said to herself. 'Sir Lopez Grinlay paid a thousand for his wife's, and they weren't as fine as these.'

She had a quick eye for appraisement and valuation. She fingered the pearls and weighed them in her hand, and observed the roundness and flawless purity of each separate bead, and twisted the string about her white throat.

Then she opened the letter and read it twice. Tears filled her large light eyes.

'He means me to sell them,' she thought, 'or some of them; when I want money. That's why he pretends it's only the clasp to which he attaches sentiment. He was afraid to send money after what I said, so that is the way he is trying to help me.'

She leaned her head on her hand, and studied the letter, looking up occasionally at the effect of the shaded light on her hair, and at the white face and round drooping shoulders reflected in the glass, with the string of pearls hanging almost to her waist.

She had frittered her soul in flirtation, and simulated feeling successfully for so many years now, that she had almost ceased to know how far any of her emotions were real.

'I suppose I meant him to help me all the time,'

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she thought, 'or I shouldn't have said all that about the wretchedness and the poverty. God knows that's true. . . . I could sell them a few at a time — it's almost too long — and he'd never know if he saw them. Besides, he's so careless he'll forget all about them long before he comes home. Or I could sell the whole thing and wear a string of imitation ones, with the clasp. . . . A thousand pounds and perhaps more! He's "*made arrangements.*" Of course that means they'll give me the money and take the pearls back. I should hate to lose them now. How much simpler it would have been to send me a cheque! Men are so stupid. After all, though, I impressed it on him that I was hurt at the notion of his helping us. But I had to; he might have seen I *had* to. And it's true I should have hated it. One can't take money. But when a man is rolling in it, one finds it hard. I wonder if I should have cared for him if he'd been poor? It's all very well for people to talk, but when a man has a large fortune it *does* make one think more of him. It sheds a glamour of romance. It's all nonsense for people to say money is prosaic. It's a kind of magic. And when one hasn't got any. That, *and* his being so awfully good-looking. I'll take the pearls to Bond Street and get them valued and decide what to do. After all, I'm afraid to keep anything so valuable here. Suppose it got stolen! What a fool I should be! And there's always the clasp to remind me ——'

She put it to her lips before the looking glass, and thought she looked very pretty in the rose-tinted light. She smiled at herself archly, and her small even teeth gleamed.

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Then she rose and read the letter for the last time before locking it away in her desk with a little shiver.

The room was cold.

A sudden and vivid realisation of all that Michael's gift might mean if she chose, swept across her mind. She stood for a moment clasping her ringed hands in the affected ecstasy that had become second nature. Then, with a kind of reckless eagerness, she lit the gas-fire, and pulled down the blinds, shutting out the grimy yellow close of the raw day.

The room immediately seemed warmer and brighter and more snug, symbolizing the sudden vivid glow of anticipation and hope and pleasure in her own mind.

'I'll send for the doctor to-morrow, and get poor Mamma everything she ought to have, and nice warm things for her and the kids; and see we have decent meals and send them off wherever he advises for a change,' she thought with a burst of energy and excitement. 'And I shall be able to get myself everything I want, and afford to travel about and pay some visits, without spending a quarter of the money — Oh thank God,' she said, and flung herself suddenly upon her knees beside the bed. 'Oh, Michael, I *am* grateful, I am. I'll go to the Oratory to-morrow on my way to Bond Street. I will. I won't forget. And I'll pray for you every day of my life. . . .'

Miss Milly insisted upon going to Southampton to see her nephew off for South Africa; and on returning, called in Eaton Place, and painted a

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graphic picture of his departure for Edith's benefit, weeping profusely as she did so.

'Oh my dear, if you could have been there. So much that was interesting, and you would have been like me, hardly able to see any of it for crying. The place crammed with soldiers, and a young officer making a man twice as big as himself empty a nice bottle of cold tea which his wife had brought him, on to the ground. I couldn't help telling him he was very tyrannical, and he laughed quite good naturedly; but the man, instead of being grateful, *winked* at me when the officer wasn't looking. And poor Michael, as light-hearted as ever, not seeming to realise he might never come back. He took me on board and kissed me good-bye in a horrid little cabin which he was sharing with three other men. I think it's a shame, because everybody knows what a lot of money he's spent on it all. I got him to show me which was his bunk however, and I slipped a dear little book called "Crumbs of Manna" under the pillow. He will find it to-night when he's tossing about on the wide sea, poor boy, and know his old auntie put it there.'

'Did you see Sir Bernard?'

'Yes, poor lad. I daresay his poor sister was very like him. He is too pretty for a boy, and far too young to go at all, as I told him. I should think the Boers would be ashamed of themselves to go shooting at a delicate lad like that,' said Aunt Milly, warmly, 'and his own mother never coming to see him off, nor even his auntie in London. It must have been a mortification to him though he braved it out like a man that he'd begged them not to come. So did Michael beg me not to come, but I

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went all the same; and I'm glad I did, for I'll never forget that big ship moving off, and my boy jumping up on the railing or the bulwark or whatever they call it, just by the big drooping flag; and not a breath of air, and the band playing, and Michael waving his helmet at me. I could see that against the sky ever so long after the rest was all a blur.'

She stopped to cry and went on.

'His last word was about you. "Take care of Miss Roath, and be sure and let me know how she is when you write, and beg her not to work herself to death," he said.'

Miss Milly, for all her emotion, looked in Edith's face searchingly as she spoke; but Edith did not colour, nor did her clear eyes waver in their kind steady regard.

'He always thinks of others,' she remarked, gently.

CHAPTER XXIV

Bernard Gryffydd was killed in February, 1901, at Haartebeestefontein; and Edith was sorrowfully reading the account of the action in which he fell, when she received an agonised letter from Mrs. Loveden, entreating her either to go herself, or to send a kind and experienced nurse, upon whom she could rely, to Aberfraw. She learned that, on the receipt of the War Office telegram announcing her son's death, Lady Gryffydd had been seized with paralysis, and now lay between life and death; and that her sister was hastening to her side, and to the assistance of the little inexperienced daughter and sole surviving child, Thekla.

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Colonel Bertwald was comparatively well for the moment, and Edith longed for change of air and surroundings, so that she made up her mind, with the promptness that characterised her, to undertake herself the business of nursing Lady Gryffydd. She despatched a couple of telegrams, packed her trunk, and met Mrs. Loveden at Paddington in time to accompany her by the mid-day train to Wales.

'I thought Thekla had become a nun,' said Edith to the poor lady, who, dressed in deepest mourning, sat in the opposite corner of the railway carriage, holding fast a purse, a handkerchief, and a small black bag containing her rosary, a bottle of salts, and a flask of port wine and water, provided by Sims for the journey.

'She became a postulant immediately after her sister Winefride's death,' said Mrs. Loveden. 'But she only remained six months. Her health broke down. You know it is a very hard life in that Order; and besides, it was decided that she had no vocation. Poor little thing, it was a bitter disappointment to her, and to her mother; but God knows best, and you see, my dear, He would not allow my poor sister to be left all alone after her long life of devotion to her children. And Thekla was always her favourite. Yet she was so willing to give her up. But then, of course, she thought there would always be dear Bernard —'

Under her thick crêpe veil the poor lady wept bitterly, and Edith uttered a little murmur of sympathy, leaned back in her corner, and asked no more questions.

She grieved for Mrs. Loveden, and for the stricken mother, whose strength had given way under the

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weight of accumulated sorrows, and for the little sister; and for Michael, whom she knew to be mourning passionately for his friend. But for the dead boy himself she did not grieve, for it appeared to her that to be shot through the heart on the battlefield was a fate infinitely preferable to the living death of lifelong incarceration in a monastic cell.

There was almost a hint of spring in the air as they reached the little picturesque station of Aberfraw, and entered the brougham which had been sent to meet them. In spite of the late hour of the afternoon, the daylight had not altogether faded from the west, and the air was at once milder and fresher than in the London they had left.

As the laden station-brougham moved slowly up the steep drive, the rooks were cawing and birds calling and twittering to each other, and a line of shut crocuses edged the road with gold.

Mrs. Loveden left Sims to concern herself with wraps and hand-bags, and took Edith to the big library before she went to her sister; and Edith looked round the gloomy, lofty room, with its oaken ceiling and heraldic shields, and the innumerable books, real and sham, which lined the walls. She shivered a little after her journey, in spite of the blazing fire of logs and fir-cones on the stone hearth.

She moved to the great windows, and stood looking out into the gathering twilight — the outline of the leafless trees against the clear tender light of the sky, — and thought of Michael and of the tragic end of his love-story, and of the young owner of the castle, dead in South Africa.

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On the massive writing-table stood the pile of brown ledgers which held so many entries in Bernard's writing; and, beside them, the *replica* of a striking photograph she had seen at Mrs. Loveden's house.

It represented Winefride in a white gown, standing against a background of dark yew, with her hands full of wild flowers, and her fair hair uncovered.

The photograph had been taken in the fountain garden at the imperious request of her lover, who had caused an expert to come over from Paris and execute the order.

Edith's glance at it, even in the failing light, brought it back distinctly to her memory. A moment later, the sound of a footstep made her turn; and turning, she came face to face with, as it seemed to her, the original of the photograph.

Her start was succeeded instantly by the realisation of Thekla's identity, and she thought she had never seen so fair a face.

Sorrow, or discipline, had softened Thekla's expression, and the long-lashed blue eyes were almost pathetic in the appeal they made; her childish, oval face was thinner and paler than before her probation.

'I'm very, very glad you came yourself. I feel as I if knew you. Bernard wrote to us about you before he sailed.'

'I only saw him for one moment,' said Edith, gently. 'Mr. Ferrys brought him.'

'I know, I know. But you are a friend of *his* — Michael's; and Bernard loved Michael better than anyone in the world, except Winefride.' She

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uttered the names of her dead brother and sister simply and without pretence of hesitation.

'And you —'

'Oh, no — not me. I don't mean they didn't love me — oh, no. I was Winefride's only sister, but they were older; I was always — the odd one,' she said, with a sound between laughter and tears, not complaining, but infinitely tender. She looked at Edith with the awe of a young maiden for an older woman who has already fulfilled an ideal. 'But Bernard knew how much Michael thought of you, and *he* thought you splendid, himself, even though he only saw you for that moment.'

It needed only a smile from Edith to turn Thekla's awe into shy adoration.

'Will you come to Mamma now, please,' she said. 'There isn't anything to wait for. She doesn't know anybody.'

Lady Gryffydd lay in the great four-poster from which she could see the cot in the corner which had once belonged to Bernard, but she was taking no heed of that now, nor of any other material object.

Her pale blue eyes were dull and glassy, her weak mouth was drawn painfully to one side, and her large face was of a livid, deathly hue. The arm and white hand that lay on the red silk quilt were rigid, and save for the noisy, laboured breathing, she might have been a corpse.

Mrs. Loveden was kneeling by the bedside of her sister, weeping and saying her rosary, while in the background the old Welsh doctor whispered to the stout countrywoman, Olwen, who had brought up

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Lady Gryffydd's children; she had now for many years supervised the scanty household, and become both maid and housekeeper for her gentle mistress; and she watched the entry of the new nurse with jealous eyes.

An hour later Edith, in nursing cap and apron, had taken charge of the situation, and was tending her unconscious patient, supplementing the clumsy application of the ordered remedies by her own skilled methods; while the housekeeper — transformed, by the relief of the discovery that banishment was not to be her portion, into a willing slave — made mustard poultices and ice-bags under her friendly and authoritative direction.

The old doctor, expressing thankfulness, withdrew for much-needed rest; and Mrs. Loveden, her anxieties soothed, was already sleeping heavily upon the sofa in her own room, where Sims alternately sniffed and unpacked, without disturbing her mistress in the least.

And Thekla, poor child, with a heavy burden of responsibility and terror lifted from her slender shoulders, knelt in the chapel offering her thanksgivings, and yet unable to keep the sorrowful amaze that so much grief should be her portion out of the still childish mind; while her lips mechanically repeated familiar prayers.

'The world is full of sorrow and disappointment and anxiety,' she thought, resting her fair brow, that ached with crying, against her little supplicating hands. 'Oh, God, isn't it enough? First Winnie and then Bernard. Oh, let poor Mamma get well. But not if she is to suffer. Oh, not if it

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is only to pain and grief. But how can I be left all alone? What am I to do in the world? I tried to leave it. Winefride gone, and Bernard, oh Bernard! and now poor Mamma —'

Then she thought of Edith with the eternal hope, springing in the midst of grief, which belongs to youth; idealising her as an angel sent with healing in her wings, and resting mentally upon the grave and steady sweetness of the older woman's calm presence.

'She will help me. Bernard wrote that she was beautiful, with the beauty that he had imagined as the beauty of the saints and queens of long ago. Severe and noble and serene. He saw her only once, and when he wrote I wondered if he had fallen a little in love with her at first sight. Oh God, forgive me. Bernard, darling, darling! He was far, far away from all thoughts of earthly love. Oh, why should I cry like this, when he's gone to Winefride, who loved him best of all, and my work has been given to me? To stay here and take care of poor Mamma. I will be brave, I will, I will. Oh God, what shall I do?'

She tried to keep her wandering thoughts fixed once more upon the familiar words she was uttering, and the incessant repetition of them presently soothed her nerves and spirits, so that when at length she rose from her knees and stole upstairs to her mother's room her face was calm, though stained with weeping.

Edith met her at the door, with the smile that charmed and the look that at once claimed and inspired confidence.

'Do you know she is better? I think she is com-

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ing to herself a little. It's doubly important that you and Mrs. Loveden should get a good night's rest, and have cheerful faces to show her in the morning, in case she should be able to recognise you.'

By the following day Lady Gryffydd had partially recovered.

She was still unable to move, and one side was paralysed; but her eyes showed consciousness, and the housekeeper was gratified by an evident preference for her ministrations.

There was even a murmur of fondness as her daughter bent to kiss her; and Thekla's spirits bounded up with the elasticity natural to her age and disposition.

She eagerly begged to be allowed to accompany Edith on her walk, and invited her to come to the grove and see the monastery, now in process of building.

'Are you sure you would not rather take your walk alone? I know you ought to have rest as well as exercise,' she said, anxiously. 'But it would be a great, great pleasure to me to be allowed to come with you.'

Edith assured her that she preferred companionship when she could get it.

'But you must be very tired. You have been up all night.'

'No, I am used to it. I shall sleep this afternoon, and all the better for this fine mountain air. How beautiful — how beautiful it is!'

She stood on the terrace, looking over the panorama of hills and valleys and river that was stretched before her in the brilliant February sunshine of the

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wild west country. Distant torrents showed like slender white threads in dark gullies where black yews glistened in the sun. Little white cottage homes on the mountain-side sent straight slender spires of blue smoke up against the brown of the leafless woods in the still air. Cries and laughter of children rose from the school playground in the valley to the height on which they stood, and the whistling of the ploughman at the home-farm was clear and shrill. The hint of spring in the preceding afternoon had become a promise with the brightness of the morning. The crocuses expanded their golden hearts on the terrace garden, and clumps of daffodils glowed in their fresh tints of pale clear yellow and orange.

The flowering *ribes* still filled dark corners with rose-coloured bloom. The air was fragrant with the scent of good moist earth, newly freed from cleansing frost and melting snow, yielding itself to the warm and wholesome influence of sun and west wind. In the background rose the mighty solid structure of old masonry and giant blocks of stone, embraced by a tracery of brown clinging stems and tendrils that would presently hang out curtains of fresh green foliage and pure blossom.

Last year's nests of house-martins and swifts clung to the walls beneath sheltering projections, and Thekla showed them and said mournfully, 'Bernard would never have them touched, and now I never will'; and Edith remembered that this child of nineteen, in her shabby black serge frock, was also the owner of a great estate and of the ancient castle which dominated it.

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They walked along the terrace and through the grove, which was a wild enclosure of rock and gorse and rough pasture, beautified by old forest trees, until they reached presently a space, very slightly sloping to the south, where, in an old orchard, guarded on its outskirts by a few giant oaks, and with a little stream bubbling gaily along the lower boundary — the ruins of the old church and monastery had lain untouched for so many years.

Now the short massive columns had been lifted from their mossy beds, the outline of the ancient buildings carefully traced and followed, and the new walls raised to a height of some fifteen or twenty feet.

Since it was noon the workmen were lunching as merrily as the children were playing in the field below. They sat about on the mounds which might be graves, or buried masonry, and brought the wholesome breath of life and human speech into the deserted place.

Thekla showed Edith where the stone coffin of the last abbot had been unwittingly disturbed, and where human bones had been perforce disinterred; and how magnificent were the proportions of the church which had once towered over the monastery.

'It is Michael's monument to Winnie,' she said, in her soft, childish voice; 'Bernard said it was that, and something more. Perhaps Bernard would have come here and lived always among the hills and the people he loved, and yet fulfilled his vocation. But God willed otherwise. Still, the work will be finished, for before Bernard left he told me it had all been settled and the money provided.'

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'I wonder,' said Edith, hesitating, 'that Michael did not come to see it before he sailed.'

Thekla shook her head, and a faint colour rose in her fair face.

'He has never been here since my Winnie died. I suppose he could not bear to come,' she said; and a silence fell between them.

'It is hard on the child. No one knows that better than I do,' said Mrs. Loveden, piteously. 'But what can I do? To break up my little home and come down here would be a great misery to me, and a very doubtful advantage to Thekla, who would thus lose her sole opportunity of coming to London at all. And it is not as though the dear child were like Winefride, who was so very gentle, and, as you know, clung to me always —' since Winefride's death the poor lady had unconsciously magnified this dependence of her favourite niece upon herself. 'But Thekla has a much stronger character and she will be of age in a year and six weeks, when no one in the world will be able to interfere with her, for she comes into everything that belonged to her poor brother. Her mother and my brother Ambrose are only trustees till then, and Ambrose sees no reason why everything here shouldn't go on as usual without any interference from him. The agent here has been trusted for years, and indeed there was never a more reliable, worthy creature living; and Winefride and Thekla always seemed to me to know the ins and outs of the estate just as well as Bernard did. What could I do living here? — though I am willing to come and stay for weeks at a time if that is all. If Thekla had

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been a nun it would have been different. Of course then I should have taken my sister to London and kept her with me. But I haven't room for both, and Olwen too. Or if anything happened to my poor sister, and Thekla chose to let this great place and come to London — but I hope we needn't think of that. She is getting better, thank God,' said Mrs. Loveden, looking into Edith's face with appealing eyes.

'I think Lady Gryffydd may live many years,' said Edith gently. 'The doctor says it is quite possible. But, on the other hand, he is afraid she will never be much better than she is now. It is of course impossible to be certain.'

'Do you mean she will always be — rather childish? That her memory will never return?'

'Wouldn't it be rather merciful?' said Edith gently. 'If she remains as she is now — she will not realise that her son is dead — though she may vaguely miss him, and ask when he's coming back, as she did this morning. Her brain, perhaps, won't be able to grasp new happenings, but she will know you all — all the familiar faces that she loves —'

'All that are left,' wailed Mrs. Loveden. 'Poor little Thekla and me.'

'And your brothers, and her old servants and friends,' said Edith, with that never-failing note of consolation. 'Besides, she has such a placid disposition that I think — it sounds strange — but I think she may be very happy, living entirely in the present and in her own surroundings.'

'Poor little Thekla! And what is she to do? Her mother will never have any real authority again. Their positions are reversed.'

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'But she has, as you say, a great deal of character,' said Edith slowly. 'When she finds her mother dependent on her, she will rise to the occasion. She will develop very quickly from a child into a woman — and besides, later on, she may marry.'

'If she married I could take my sister to London.'

'To be sure you could.'

'As it is, I see nothing for it but to leave them here together. Poor Mary Theresa! and poor, poor little Thekla, so bright and pretty and young, alone with a paralysed and half-childish mother. What a death in life for them both!'

'Nothing lasts,' said Edith.

Lady Gryffydd accepted her nurse's ministrations placidly, even though she showed a preference for Olwen's more familiar presence. As the days went on her speech became more coherent, but her memory remained confused.

She babbled softly and incessantly, and her babbling was a kind of travesty of her usual conversation, which could only be infinitely painful to Mrs. Loveden; though it naturally affected Thekla less, since she had never been accustomed to pay much attention to her mother's inconsequent remarks.

Mrs. Loveden grew increasingly restless, and at length proposed that she should return to London.

'I am not wanted here. I left in a great hurry, without time to set anything in order, and I cannot sleep here for sadness. This house is full of sorrow and memory. I shall be ill myself before long,' she said piteously to Edith. 'If the child wanted me it would be different; or even if my poor

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sister clung to me as she does to Olwen. But as it is I am not doing much good; and if you think there will be no change —'

Edith did not think there would be much change, and she could not honestly say that she thought Mrs. Loveden was doing much good, or that Thekla wanted her.

On the contrary, Thekla, hearing of her aunt's determination to leave, said fervently to her new friend, 'Now I shall have you all to myself.'

'I cannot stay much longer. Olwen can do everything that is necessary. She is a very good nurse, and I have to return to my uncle,' said Edith.

'But not yet. Oh, wait a little longer. I want you so,' said Thekla.

Mrs. Loveden and Sims went home, and Edith remained at Aberfraw.

The days, though monotonous, were to her not dull; for she loved the country, and Thekla's devotion to herself touched her; while the innocent gentle personality of the patient aroused a certain affection as well as pity.

Every morning she walked with Thekla in the sunshine of an unusually fine season; and as the sick-room claimed her presence less often, and her nights were seldom disturbed, the walks became daily longer, until at last Thekla took her to the Glen to visit the hermit.

Mr. Edyvean had displayed his usual tact in the matter of Thekla's return from the convent.

He let no sign of his rejoicing escape him, and gave no hint of an inclination to triumph over a prophecy fulfilled.

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'God would not take away the only joy of my poor life,' he had said, holding out welcoming hands. 'Such as you are wanted to brighten this grey world, little Thekla; we want your golden halo, here, to remind us of the golden halos of the angels.'

Her sore childish heart had been a little comforted by the joy of his welcome, as by the flattering gladness with which her return had been hailed by humbler friends at Aberfraw; though, with the delicacy and reserve of their class, the cottagers had made no comment in her hearing.

Thekla had written a feverish, hurried note to tell Mr. Edyvean of her brother's death and her mother's illness, and since had written no more.

'Are you sure he will not mind my coming with you?' Edith asked.

'He has always given me leave to bring anyone I liked. He knows *I* shouldn't make a mistake and bring the wrong kind of person,' said Thekla, 'and he must be anxious to hear, though he never writes letters, nor pays visits himself. I think he must have taken some kind of a vow about such things. Besides, he loved Michael very much, and he was dreadfully sorry when he was ill; so you would be welcome as his friend as well as mine.'

Mr. Edyvean met them on the threshold of the little porch, and looked from the slender, golden-haired girl, in her deep mourning, to the stately cloaked form and severely-framed, pale face and lustrous eyes of the hospital nurse who accompanied her, and as he looked, and Thekla said: 'This is Miss Edith Roath; she is nursing Mamma, and she is a great friend of Michael —' she was astonished to hear him say, still looking at Edith:

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'Your name is familiar to me, as perhaps mine is to you. Or is it too long ago? Are you too young?'

'The name Edyvean is familiar, but it was not *Mr.* Edyvean,' faltered Edith, 'but I never thought —'

'It has been Mr. Edyvean for a great number of years,' he interrupted, with a look which silenced her; and added more gently, 'Your face would make you welcome anywhere, but doubly welcome here,' and held out to her in silence the locket on his watch-chain.'

'My Aunt Elizabeth!'

'Your great-aunt Elizabeth,' he corrected; 'you are very like her.'

'My mother is more like her.'

'That was the little Elspeth she used to talk about?'

'Yes.'

They were friends at once, and no further explanations passed. Nor did Thekla ask any questions. She sat by with her pretty face turned to the blue hills that peeped between the leafless trees in the gully, and listened absently as Mr. Edyvean talked of the war, and of the probabilities of its ending, and of Michael Ferrys. The old man held her slender hand and caressed it reverently, and she knew that though he talked of Michael he thought of Bernard.

Presently she bethought herself that they might like to talk of matters more intimate, since their relationship had been so unexpectedly revealed; and she asked if she might gather some of the violets which abounded under the shelter of the

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ledge which formed the garden. But when she was gone it was of her they talked.

'She is fretting herself pale and thin — she will lose her own health, little flower that she is,' he said, sorrowfully.

'It is because she is so fair that she looks fragile,' said Edith; 'indeed I think her perfectly healthy.'

'Aye, but how can she remain so, when she's unhappy? Her bright spirits are failing,' he said, shaking his head dismally.

'She has had enough to affect her spirits. Her sister's and brother's deaths, and now her mother's illness. And she felt leaving her convent, I am sure.'

He frowned impatiently. 'It is none of these things,' he said abruptly. 'What, haven't you found it out? The child is in love — whether she knows it or not. You look surprised, and no wonder. It is a strange thing for me to blurt out to you. But I have a reason.' His tone was pleading. 'She is so young. She must not miss happiness. And Michael too — is young.'

'I think you must be mistaken,' said Edith, amazed, 'for I know from Michael himself that he never saw Winefride's sister.'

'But she saw him,' said Mr. Edyvean. 'Day after day, she saw him; keeping her vigil with poor Bernard, whose hero the lad was; and indeed I do not wonder, for there was something lovable about him, since my own affection too went out to him at first sight. And little Thekla — but there must have come some scruple into the poor little heart, that had been filled with the thought of her vocation until she set eyes on her dead sister's

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betrothed, for she fled back to her convent as soon as they said he was out of danger. At least this is my reading of her maiden thoughts.'

Edith looked at him with her clear sensible eyes, and he divined her reflection.

'You judge me a romantic old visionary. But I have so much time in my solitude to ponder over her sad little history, and I have known the child ever since she could walk, when her brother and sister brought her over, each holding a hand, looking down so anxiously at her funny little peach-blossom face. She full of mischief, like a mortal babe between two guardian angels, for there was always something unearthly in their fairness. I used to laugh at them, but Thekla, the little black sheep, pretty rogue, crept into my heart. She is the only thing on earth that is dear to me. Forgive an old man, my dear, the old husband of your great-aunt Elizabeth — who asks you — couldn't you encompass happiness for her?'

Edith's grave dark eyes did not leave his anxious face. He was paler than usual, perhaps from the shock of meeting her, and the silver stubble glistened on his chin, and the silver hair on his brows, above his handsome eagle features. There was a moisture in his keen hazel eyes, and he looked at her with a rather pathetically persuasive smile.

'The lad loved her sister, as you doubtless know, and the wedding was put off in the hope that he would become a Roman Catholic. He was an agnostic, and a shallow one at that, but he loved her so that he went off and shut himself up to study in a monastery, to give them every chance of converting him. Evidently they did convert him, for he

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rushed down here, no doubt to tell her; and, by one of the cruellest tricks fate ever played a man, he arrived to find her dead — drowned in that river.' He made an almost savage gesture with his arm. 'You know the story if you know him.'

'I know the story,' Edith said.

'But he became a Catholic all the same, and he must have been convinced indeed if such a blow as that could not shake his faith,' said Mr. Edyvean, vehemently. 'He was actually praying in the chapel, poor fellow when he fainted, and struck his head — and it was at that moment that poor little Thekla saw him first; though, as you say, he did not see her.'

'In the chapel,' Edith repeated.

'Aye, she came in from the sacristy with fresh flowers for the altar,' he said, 'and saw him. My dear, you don't need an old man to tell you that there is such a thing as love at first sight. The child described to me his upturned face, and the sorrow and the longing on it, and she did not dream how her own betrayed her, as I listened to her poor little pitiful broken words. She was off her guard, thinking me a dull old man who had forgotten what love and youth mean.' He laughed. 'How should she suppose that an unshorn old ruffian in a red flannel shirt would be likely to observe that she is never happy nor interested unless we talk of one subject, and that, if we stray from the discussing of Michael Ferrys for a moment, she brings the conversation back to him by artless methods of her own, amazing in the cunning of their simplicity. Poor child; with that bright rose colour that comes and goes and makes me tremble for her when it leaves

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her, at last so pale and transparent. She was not made for heart-ache or suffering. And what did he love in that little dead saint that he would not find in her living sister? All, all, and a thousand times more,' he said, urgently. 'He would love her if he saw her. He must. She is the same, but lovelier, with more depth in her character, more variety in her moods. At the time, of course, there was nothing to be said. But now that time has passed by — he is young — he will love again. And she is the living image of her dead sister. Her little hand would lead him as surely as Winefride's towards all things good. Even more surely, for she has the will of the Gryffydds and a power of persuasion all her own. You are his friend; you must recognise as I did the weakness of his character. You know I hold no brief for the Church of Rome. I love the little English church down there in the valley, if I love any church at all. But I am only a poor recluse, filled with my own thoughts and dreams. Yet this I know — if ever a man needed a religion to guide him — a faith to sustain him, Michael Ferrys is that man. If he falls into the wrong hands — and how many of the wrong hands will be stretched out to grasp that colossal wealth — well — well! He is a chameleon, and will take the colour of his surroundings. It must have been the atmosphere of the monastery which converted him, for I do not think arguments would have done so readily — from the reasoning bout I had with him. But of course I don't know.'

But Edith knew.

As he spoke she was oppressed by that familiar curious sensation that sometimes supplants surprise,

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the conviction that she was taking part in a scene she had played in long ago; the certainty that she had heard the hermit say the same words before, amid the same surroundings and in the same circumstances; that she had always known the explanation of Michael's vision in the chapel. A little dazed, she looked round the hut; at the curtained alcove; the glue-pot on the slow-combustion stove; the shelves of books high above the solid carpenter's table, with its homely litter of tools and shavings.

The suspicion of quavering age in the hermit's low-toned voice made his pleading pathetic in her ears.

'If they could but meet when he comes back! But I am quite powerless — my fear is that he will never come near the place again. It is only a woman who could help — a woman who knew them both —'

Edith looked at him, and the wistfulness of his gaze touched her, but she was troubled and uncertain in her own mind.

'It is not so easy as you think,' she faltered; 'there is — a — a complication which I can't explain.' To herself she said — '*If he comes here — if he sees her — he will lose his faith.*' These words she repeated to herself several times as though in excuse; and also thought of what Mr. Edyvean had said: '*If ever a man needed a religion to guide him —*'

Aloud she said mechanically again: 'There is a complication.'

'Another woman?' He spoke under his breath in dismay, and as it seemed involuntarily.

'Not that.' Then she stopped and the colour

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rushed into her face; but she went on bravely. 'I was not thinking of that.'

His confusion was manifested by the disconcerted way in which he rose and pushed back his chair.

'I daresay I am a blundering officious fool,' he said. 'I have very likely been betrayed into a monstrous indiscretion by my very love for the child — and my interest in the lad. I lie there,' he pointed to the alcove, 'wakeful for long, long hours in the long nights, thinking and thinking; and all this tragedy of youth cut short has probably helped to turn my old brain. You must forgive me. But I — I trusted you at sight.'

'Yet — I may not be able — to help you in this matter,' she said, in a low voice, as she rose also.

He took her hand and pressed it hastily, and said without looking at her:

'Whatever you do, I could not mistrust your motives. You have not my Elizabeth's eyes for nothing.'

Thekla returned with a quantity of violets that scented the whole cottage as she entered. She made up a small bouquet, and fastened it beneath Edith's chin; and bestowed a buttonhole on her host, and remarked simply, like a child, that she would take the rest to her Winnie The old man touched her fair hair lightly and said no word.

It was not, after all, of her, but of Edith, that he thought, as the two went away, side by side, down the steep path which led through the leafless woods.

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CHAPTER XXV

'A GOVERNMENT college of cookery with an army of French *chefs* as instructors; that is what is wanted,' said Colonel Bertwald. 'Where in the world, except England, is one poisoned when one goes out to dinner? Last night I dined out, contrary to my usual practice, but the host was the son of an old friend who married a stupid nobody for her money: a poor soul who can't understand why his title doesn't carry her beyond the outside edge of society. So it might if she were honest and vulgar, instead of being artificial and genteel. And she gave a dinner to match. Give you my word I believe the whole thing came straight from a pastrycook. Tinned and bottled horrors. Stale truffles, and cockscombs preserved in spirits, from their unwholesome museum of edible mummies. Petrified morsels of carrots and turnips chipped into shapes, and preserved peas tinted with arsenic — and this is June! June, when in Covent Garden market you can buy sweet juicy country vegetables. But the mistress of the house was saved all trouble, at the expense of her guests' digestions, by paying so much a head.'

'We got sick of tinned things in South Africa,' said Michael.

'Of course you did, but campaigning is one thing, and a civilised dinner-party is another. At least it ought to be,' said the old gentleman, fuming. 'Never mind. It's given me an idea, and I'll hunt it to the bitter end. But now for yourself, my boy. Congratulations and welcome. You've done

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well, eh? Come through it all from beginning to end safe and sound like our own boys. Captain in the army, eh, and a D.S.O.'

Michael shook hands again with the little withered gentleman, whose feebleness and pallor had increased so greatly during the years of his visitor's absence that his burning eyes alone seemed alive, as he lay back, exhausted after his tirade, in the armchair by the study fire.

'It was nice of you to ask me. I appreciate it, I appreciate it. Most of Edith's visitors do nothing of the kind.'

'How is she, sir?'

'She's all right,' said Colonel Bertwald, carelessly. 'Went back to her hospital work, you know. But comes in most days to have a look at me, and leaves London very rarely. All on my account. I'm not so young as I was. Always been devoted to me ever since she was a pretty little romp of a child, with twice the wit her brothers ever had between them. Not that they haven't given a good account of themselves when they had the chance. So poor Tom has his heart's desire and has got into the army at last! But it's Edith I care for. She'll get every half-penny I've got in the world,' said the old man, wistfully. 'Well — well — you heard of her mother's marriage? Took us all by surprise.'

Mrs. Roath's marriage had not taken Michael by surprise, but he expressed only his interest and sympathy.

'Between ourselves,' said Colonel Bertwald, lowering his voice, 'Erconwald is far better suited to my niece than ever poor Roath was. Taken a new lease of life as an ambassadress, I hear, and climate

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seems to suit her. I can't read his poems, but I dare say she can, which is all that matters. And after all he's been more than a mere poet. Distinguished man. Lost both his boys, poor fellow, while all her three came safely through. Fortune of war.'

'Lady Erconwald wrote to me,' said Michael, 'and Miss Roath also wrote to me. She seemed very pleased about the marriage.'

'Pleased! It's an enormous relief. One never could be sure what poor Elspeth would be up to. Now she's in safe hands, you know. I only wish Edith would go and do likewise. Far too pretty and far too good to be slaving away in a hospital,' said Edith's great-uncle, and his eyes watered.

'I agree with you, sir,' said Michael.

Colonel Bertwald eyed him for a moment thoughtfully and demanded:

'Going to stand for Parliament?'

'I'm thinking of going back to South Africa.'

'Why — the war's over.'

'I've friends there who knew my father, and it's not a strange country to me. I should find plenty to do there, and opportunities.'

'Oh, aye. You speak their lingo?'

'I hope so. I was born there, you know,' said Michael, smiling.

Colonel Bertwald only stayed for a moment to greet his niece and receive her apologies for being late, and then, with a nod to his visitor, shuffled out of the library and banged the door after him, according to his invariable custom.

Michael and Edith faced each other.

The interval of years had dwelt more hardly with him than with her. He was leaner and browner,

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and in harder condition than he had ever been, but there were deep lines cut in his face, that had been so smooth and boyish. The brown curly hair was perceptibly thinned, slightly grey on the temples. He looked more than thirty years old.

Edith, on the other hand, looked less. Her pure-complexioned face showed no lines; if the youthful bloom had paled, the grave dark eyes were still beautiful and striking. She had been away from London for some weeks, nursing a case through a long convalescence. The change had rested her no less than the patient, an overworked judge and a delightful companion.

The tired expression of the professional nurse who has known too many sleepless nights had been charmed from her eyes and mouth. She was in good spirits, fresh and charming.

As she looked at Michael she smiled, and in response the twinkle leapt to his eyes, and the deprecating smile to his lips, and restored momentarily the boyishness of his face.

'That is more like yourself. I was afraid you had grown serious.'

'So I have,' he laughed.

'Am I to say Captain Ferrys now?'

'Please not. I'm a civilian again. All very well for the Roaths. You should see what an important man old Humphrey is out there.'

'I wish he'd come home.'

'You could go out and see him,' suggested Michael, and he coloured all over his brown face. 'Look here, I have a thousand and one things to say to you. Will you come and dine with me somewhere this evening?'

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'Why not here?'

'Your uncle?'

'It would gratify him so enormously,' Edith pleaded. 'He's begun to find out he bores people, poor old dear, and I can't bear it. Besides, he'll leave us together to talk after dinner. He goes to bed early.'

Michael yielded with his usual easy grace.

'Shall you be in uniform?' he asked, with a glance at her nursing dress and a smile.

'No, I will come in what we call "worldly clothes."'

'I'm glad of that. I want to be reminded of — Clode, and our friendship.'

She blushed because his look was rather ardent than friendly, but spoke without confusion.

'Though you look older and wiser, I suppose you have not changed much — in essentials?' she asked curiously.

'I have changed a great deal,' said Michael instantly. 'I will tell you to-night how much. By the by, you are a shockingly bad correspondent.'

'I had my mother and three brothers to write to — and my work to do,' she said, excusing herself. 'I acknowledge you are an unusually good one.'

'I have often thought I ought to have been a journalist,' he said, nodding. 'Good chaps, some of those war-correspondents. What time may I come this evening?'

'Eight o'clock.'

They did not touch on any serious subject during this brief interview, but Edith found herself regard-

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ing the hours which must pass before she could see Michael again as interminable, although she knew that they must be filled with work.

The realisation of her own impatience came upon her with the shock of surprise.

She gave herself conscientiously to the fulfilment of her duty throughout the day, but she could not help the working of her sub-conscious mind; and this engendered something like annoyance at the torrent of feeling which her meeting with Michael had aroused in her.

She tried to recall all the calm impartial opinions she had ever formed concerning him, and recollected that she had decided long ago that he was an egotist and a sentimentalist, borne lightly by the breath of circumstance over the surface of his own facile emotions. Yet, even while tracing in imagination the weak lines of his mouth and chin, she found herself dwelling upon the charm of his smile, and his ingratiating twinkle.

At the end of this long day she hurried round to Eaton Place and up to her own room in her uncle's house, arriving just in time to dress for dinner.

That room now represented, in a sense, her home. It was filled with treasures of her childhood and girlhood. Her father's photograph stood on the dressing-table, and above the glass hung a water-colour sketch of Clode — the old grey stone house, with the dull greens and greys of its familiar northern landscape. The sense of space and comfort, and above all the silence of her bedroom, brought soothing to her spirit; the tumult of her thoughts calmed, and she faced squarely for the first time the knowledge that she longed secretly for Michael's

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love, and that in all probability it lay within her grasp.

The thought made her cheek burn and her heart beat; she gave herself to it, however, but for an instant, before the self-control compelled by habit returned. She banished his image resolutely from her mind on the stairs, only to find Michael himself waiting eagerly for her in the drawing-room.

After all, he appeared to be quite as light-hearted as the Michael of old. At dinner he listened to Colonel Bertwald's diatribes, and answered his questions with that deferential and sympathetic manner which always endeared him to the old, and with only an occasional look or word to tell Edith that throughout he was acutely conscious and glad of her presence.

Her 'worldly clothes' took the form of a severely plain black velvet gown which followed every graceful line and curve of her tall figure faithfully, but a red June rose in her dark hair, and another in the lace at her breast, gave touches of colour which were excessively becoming to her.

Edith to-night looked beautiful and knew it, and was aware that Michael knew it, and that her uncle's dimmed eyes looked at her proudly and fondly.

She left the two men sitting over their port, and went up to the drawing-room, which was a bower of roses.

Colonel Bertwald's flowers as well as his vegetables came from Covent Garden market, and he sometimes rose at dawn to buy them for himself.

'He'll go to bed early to-night,' she thought, as she wandered softly and restlessly about the room,

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touching the roses here and there with a light, caressing hand.

Either her uncle's fatigue or Michael's tactful management cut short the after-dinner talk, and Colonel Bertwald, with many apologies for his invalid habits, said 'Good night' almost immediately after their entry into the drawing-room, and went off to bed.

Edith led the way through the French window on to the red-draped balcony, where even the London smoke could not altogether spoil the softness of the summer-night air.

At her invitation Michael lighted a cigarette, and they sat down side by side in the semi-darkness, with a pleasant, intimate sense of comradeship.

'I brought your mother's letter to read to you. I kept it for you as you asked,' he said.

'She said I might see anything she wrote to you.'

He took it from his pocket-book, and, leaning forward into the square of light cast by the open window from the drawing-room lamps, read it aloud.

'Edith will have told you of my marriage. Since I saw you last a thousand times have I thought of Disraeli's saying:

"'Grief is the agony of a moment.
Indulgence in it is the mistake of a lifetime."

'The very excess of my sorrow forced it the sooner to expend itself; and when I raised my eyes, blind with weeping, to peer into the future, I saw an empty road of intolerable length stretching before me. I was appalled by the loneliness. Now it is no longer empty, and I walk beside a companion with whom I have every occupation, every interest, I can almost say every

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thought in common. The hours are no longer weighted with the heaviness of the heart that made them pass slowly. They fly. We have supped each our fill of sorrow, and realise acutely the fleetingness of earthly joys, and the knowledge makes the more precious this belated and unexpected good fortune. In many ways we find ourselves strangely alike; we are equally unable to endure solitude, or uncongenial companionship. . . . You will understand how proud I must be of Humphrey — and if you could read what he writes of you, you might be a little proud on your own account. Next to my three, your name is the one I have looked for most anxiously in the papers. I lie awake at night, thinking, is it possible they will all *come through safely? You well know how much more tender the thought makes me of* him, *who has given both his sons now, and is now, save for me, alone. Yet never hopeless, for he believes, as I do, in the Unseen World, and, as you know his writings, you must know also how near to him it seems . . .*

'My relations have behaved as relations generally do on these occasions. One or two have written, delighted, because I shall do them more credit as the wife of a diplomate than as an eccentric widow wandering alone over the face of the earth. One or two to remind me affectionately of my age. One distressed on the subject of settlements, and several at the thought of my children's inevitable disapproval. But as I could, and did give a résumé *of the contents of most of these epistles, — so typical of the writers, — before opening them, to my beloved partner, you may believe that my vanity was rather gratified than distressed by their contents. And there were my boys' letters, and Edith's, and those of my few friends, to assure me that some-*

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where in the world there was joy in my joy, and understanding of my need for happiness. For it is happiness, strange as it seems to myself, and it is God whom I am thanking to-day, and for ever while I live. . . .'

'It is very like her,' said Edith, with her usual frankness, 'tenderness and egotism combined. That was written, of course, soon after their marriage, but I think her absolute content has grown day by day. They are not only married but mated — that is very rare, I suppose. I felt it when they came home for a flying visit before he returned to his Embassy. Some day, I suppose, I shall go and stay with them.'

They relapsed into a silence, of which neither was wholly aware, until Michael broke the spell by striking a match and relighting his cigarette; and then Edith, in a low voice and hesitating, spoke of Bernard.

Michael had written to her at the time, so that the facts were all known to her, but she had not realised how deep was the influence the dead boy had exerted over his friend; with what extraordinary tenderness and reverence Michael the careless, the light-hearted, had regarded him.

In the summer darkness he poured forth his feelings, and she listened with tears rather of sympathy than of sorrow.

Michael stretched out his hand suddenly, and took hers, whereon tears had fallen.

'Are you crying — for him? God bless you. But his fate calls for no tears,' he said.

'Not for him, individually, for them all — for the pity of it all. The young lives cut short — those

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who sit alone in darkened houses — all over England — most of all, perhaps, for those who have given their strength and activity and health, and will drag on broken lives as invalids; for they pay dearest of all,' she said. 'But for Bernard —I did not know him.'

'I wish you had known him. I wish I had not, in my selfishness, sent him off in order to talk to you myself that day I brought him here,' said Michael, vehemently. 'I found out afterwards that he treasured up that brief glimpse of you as a kind of revelation.'

'Oh, hush,' Edith said, but she remembered Thekla's words.

'It's true. And I sent him off before you had time to form any opinion of him — scarcely to look at him.'

'I formed an opinion of him; that though he might not be very strong, physically, — though he had a delicate face and rather girlish colouring, — yet that he had a will of his own.'

'Inflexible,' said Michael. 'Curious you should have divined it.'

'And I agree with you that his fate does not call for tears,' said Edith. 'He would be a monk, and fate made him a soldier. He did his duty. He is dead. But no more dead to you, surely, than if he had become a monk.'

'Not dead to me at all,' said Michael, in a low voice, 'since I may hope to see him again.'

'Your faith is still — sure?' she said, hardly above her breath. 'You find consolation in it still?'

'I don't know what I should do,' he said simply,

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'if I lost it now. I don't know what would become of me. I should go mad, I think. After once realising the peace — the security — But, please God, I'm not very likely to lose it,' he laughed in his old manner, half-deprecating, that she remembered; and, in the same tone, murmured a few words, sincere enough, yet as one a little amused by his own strong feeling — of the historical interest of the faith he professed; its special appeal to those who were by nature weak, or sensuous, or vacillating; the completeness of its consolation; the severity of its guidance; the perfection of its organisation; the unswerving authority which brooked neither appeal nor argument.

Edith, critical even in her sympathy, said to herself:

'He has not changed, whatever he may think. He is modern, complex; not simple and single-minded. He has neither the courage of his convictions nor the glory of his illusions as Bernard had. Yet he has something he never had before, and Mr. Edyvean is right; there was never anyone who needed religion more.'

His words broke into her thoughts.

'You have been to Aberfraw. Mrs. Loveden wrote to me. I thought you would have written about it, but you never did.'

'I went to nurse poor Lady Gryffydd after the shock of her son's death. And I have been once since. She had a second stroke, and made a marvellous recovery, so far as her physical health is concerned; but her mind has practically gone.'

'She never had much,' said Michael grimly.

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Then his voice softened.

'You must have seen — Winefride's little sister — who was to have been a nun, but had no vocation after all. The little sister whom I never saw —'

Edith's heart beat fast, and to herself she said, '*And if you saw her you would know.*'

Her thoughts became unconscious prayers. '*Please God, let him never see her. Help me to keep him away. Let him never know that his faith is founded on a dream, and on the shadow of a dream . . .*'

When her attention was recalled, Michael was speaking of the church and the monastery which his money had built, and which were now finished, and in the occupation of the community for whom it had been destined.

'Thank Heaven, I made all those arrangements before I left England. I need never go near the place again. I don't suppose I ever shall. I had handed over all my responsibilities to Bernard, and I believe by his will it became the property of the Church. Any way, I have nothing to do with it.'

'Don't you want to see it?'

There was a kind of shame in the relief with which she leaned back in her chair, clasping her hands tightly together.

On the darkness of her fancy, against her will, painted in vivid colours little Thekla's fair sorrowful face, and trustful, unreproachful eyes. She tried to banish an uncomfortable vision of a too-slender childish figure moving about the great, draughty, comfortless halls of the old castle at Aberfraw, tending an imbecile mother; oppressed with cares and anxieties and responsibilities unsuited to

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her tender youth; and with that youth fading, and an innocent heart empty of hope . . .

'Not now,' Michael answered her. 'If Bernard had been there it would have been different. But what have I to do there now? No. My plan is to go back to South Africa. I can see my way to justify my existence out there as I can't in England. I want to go back — as soon as I can —' He stopped and said, 'I only came home to see you, Edith.'

She did not speak.

'Since Bernard died, my need of human companionship has brought you to my mind a thousand times. Once when I stood by, out there, watching the wasted body of a little nurse, who had worked herself to death, being lowered into her grave, the thought darted through my mind of what a fearful blank it would have been if that had been you; and I realised, almost suddenly, how tremendously your sympathy and understanding counted in my life, and thanked God that you hadn't come out to South Africa; for you, too, are one of those who would have worked yourself to death. That you were safe at home, able to write to me —'

'I didn't write much, nor often,' Edith said rather remorsefully.

'I thought of you often and much,' he said, frankly. 'There seemd no one else left; but I realised, too, that you had counted for a great deal even while my little lost angel was alive. You see, being as I am, a creature of changeful moods, it is exceedingly restful to find a companion at once so responsive and so unchanging as yourself.'

'I am not always responsive, and — companion-

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ship is not all,' said Edith; but she was conscious of a strange muffled throbbing of the heart that made breathing momentarily difficult.

'Not all, certainly,' said Michael instantly. 'But an enormous essential in — marriage. As essential as unlikeness. For instance,' he said gaily, 'a comet, I am sure, would never fall in love with another comet, but always with a fixed star. That steady, unchanging, soft brightness would certainly be the comet's ideal.'

Edith forced herself to master an unwonted nervousness.

'I suppose,' she said slowly, 'that as every woman forms some ideal of manhood, so every man has his ideal of a woman; and that — that the little girl who died — satisfied yours wholly?'

'What makes you ask that?' said Michael, quickly and almost uneasily. Then, as though constrained to an admission, he went on, 'It is true that she was the living embodiment of my boyish dreams. But now — I am a man — and she is no longer on earth.'

'But the vision of the type which she represents,' she persisted, rather tremulously, 'remains with you — her fairness — her innocence —'

'Don't,' he said, in a sharp voice of pain.

Edith turned away her face, looking over the red-draped balcony into the almost empty street below; empty save for a few amorous couples pacing the pavement arm-in-arm, and the occasional clatter past of a hansom summoned by a shrill invisible whistle.

'He does not love *me* — in that way. Not yet,' she thought, and a pain that was akin to the bitter

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pain of jealousy brought a rush of colour to her face; but she knew that it was not jealousy of the dead, but of the living.

A thin, soundless voice sang in her brain; the echo of the far-away words of the hermit: '*He would love her if he saw her. He must. She is the same . . . the living image of her dead sister . . . Her little hand would lead him . . . towards all things good . . . It is only a woman who could help.*' While her own heart pleaded as though in answer: '*Would you have him lose his faith?*' And her conscience urged: '*This is the moment to decide — before his love for you has wakened into life.*'

'The thought of her — still makes you unhappy?' she said, almost inaudibly.

Michael hesitated, and said with a kind of agitated laughter, which held nothing of merriment:

'You always force me to dive below the surface on which I like to float. It's like this — the thought of her — and of Bernard — have become blended in my mind in a most extraordinary way. As though — as though two angels, destined to save so faulty and commonplace an individual as myself, had lightened the workaday world for him for a moment and then vanished; leaving him their Faith as a consolation. Yet leaving him, none the less, mortal and with mortal needs; and — and those include the necessity of looking for mortal happiness; since, like your mother, I can endure neither solitude nor uncongenial companionship.'

'You said just now that, please God, nothing would ever shake your faith any more. What of a companion who did not share it?'

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'There would always be the hope,' he said readily, 'that in the end — she might share it.'

'There are some — who love truth, and beauty, and goodness in their hearts,' said Edith, 'to whom the name of the embodiment of these abstract things is the name of God. But that is not the same?'

'It is not the same,' he agreed, gently.

'Would that make any difference?'

'Not now. It might once. I might have been afraid — I am a poor creature, as you know. But — I told you I was changed. I have looked on death very often, and it has come very near to me.' He paused. 'Before Bernard died, he asked me to make him a promise. Perhaps he thought it would be a safeguard. He believed me to be, perhaps, more impulsive, more changeable, more easily influenced than I am. However that may be, I am not very likely to break that promise. I have sworn to him never under any circumstances to leave the Church. I am not likely to want to, because, you see, beyond and above all the rest, I have received — the gift of grace for which she prayed.'

'Would your faith — stand any test?' Edith asked, with dry lips.

'I think so,' he answered, wondering.

'Do you — give me leave — to refer to — to a confidence you once made me? I know it is as a rule — an odious thing to do — but I want to — once —'

'Surely,' he said instantly.

'If — you knew — for certain —' she said, and forced her voice to a lightness and scorn which made it sound quite natural even in her own ears, 'that

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the vision you saw — in the chapel — was only — the creation of a disordered brain — would it — would it make any difference?'

'It is curious you should say that,' said Michael, slowly, 'because I have often thought — that, after all, it might have been that. I wasn't myself. I was half out of my mind with grief and shock. But no — that certainly wouldn't make any difference . . . I have got far beyond that . . . Whether it was real or not, it gave me the impetus I needed, and led me, even in unconsciousness, to take the step which has brought me peace of mind. In that sense, I suppose, it was a miracle, as I thought it at the time.'

Edith sat motionless. Her mind, vaguely seeking to evade the agony of realisation, dwelt vaguely upon the fact that in the space of a moment the human heart can experience a strange variety of emotion. But the habits of clear thought, and straightforward reasoning, and swift decision, engendered by a life of discipline, and hard work, and self-sacrifice, prevailed.

'*His happiness is assured. But am I to snatch mine from the pain and loneliness of a child? A child who loves me.*'

Michael waited, wondering what she would say next; uncertain of her attitude towards him.

She sought words and found them.

'I think you are right to go back to South Africa,' she said. 'To-morrow I should like to hear about that. But meantime will you forgive me if I say I think you are wrong not to go and look at the monastery your money has built? They pray for you there daily, you know, as their benefactor.

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Your going would give — a great deal of happiness. More than you know.'

'Do you think so?' His voice sounded undecided. 'But Lady Gryffydd never cared much about me. I don't think I could go and stay there now —'

'You would not see her. She lives almost entirely in her own room. Indeed I am hoping soon to persuade them all that she ought to leave Aberfraw altogether and be brought to her sister here in London. It is time little Thekla was set free. She nurses her mother and keeps house, and looks after the estate. It is too much responsibility for so young a girl,' said Edith calmly. 'Though she has a great deal of character.'

'Like her brother and sister,' said Michael, with awakening interest. But I don't know her, and of course — it's *her* house now.'

'Don't you think,' she said quietly, 'that it might be a comfort to her, in her loneliness, to hear of her dead brother — from you — who loved him, and whom he loved so dearly?'

'I wrote to Lady Gryffydd — when he died — I got no answer,' said Michael. 'Of course I understand now. Yes. I suppose it might.'

'Then why don't you go?'

'Would *you* come?' he asked, obviously wavering, and she suppressed a little smile of pain in the darkness.

She looked at the dim outline of his handsome head, with its thinning crop of curling, brown hair, and realised how easily he was moved, and influenced, with something of the heart-ache of a mother who is disappointed in the nature of her child, and

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who yet knows her powerlessness to alter that nature.

She remembered that she had told him once it was not given to him to read her thoughts, and that he had only replied, 'I wonder!' and, aware of the quickness of his perception, she steadied herself to assume the impenetrably sensible tones that disconcert sentiment.

'If I came — it would be for Thekla's sake. The thought of her loneliness often oppresses me.'

Michael hesitated for a moment; then he said, without moving the cigarette from his lips:

'I should like to see the little sister.'

THE END

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